

A History of Oratory in Parliament, 1213 to 1913

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PARLIAMENT, 1213 to 1913

PREFACE

POLITICAL evolution may be only a theory which takes for granted a process and purpose in history, and tries to predict the future by the operation of causes more or less mysterious. It assumes the existence of forces in history more mechanical than evidence warrants or personal agency allows. The wider our induction of facts, of words spoken and votes recorded in certain circumstances, the less reliable shall we consider the prophecies of what is sure to happen. There will be many turnings in the stream of tendency not foreseen at present.

In the life of humanity there is constant action and reaction. Innumerable personal agencies in the British Parliament have contributed to the development of the political ideas dominant in different periods.

We can divide British history in many ways, geographical and ideal; and admit that the best divisions are only approximations to the truth, for the lines are no more real than those

INTRODUCTION

AN attempt has been made in the present work to group the important events of the past seven hundred years around the orators who, in different periods, have had most to do with the evolution of the political ideas which determined the development of the British constitution.

The history is given as much as possible by words from speeches ; and the traditional character of the orators has been kept in view in selecting their sayings. Many great men have contributed to the life of the nation who have left no record of their work. Some fragments of speeches which have been preserved are not reliable as to the exact words although they are commended by their dramatic truth. A phrase may indicate character ; but no oration worthy of the name can be condensed into a sentence. As we cannot count the drops in the stream of tendency, so we can only estimate roughly the influence due to many able speakers in Parliament. British statesmen of the front rank have generally been able on the spur of

the moment to explain and defend their policy ; and on great occasions many Members of Parliament have been able to rise to a high level of eloquence. Their power as orators has depended less on rhetoric than on the strength of their convictions when they advocated what they believed to be, in the circumstances, the best for their country.

In different centuries speeches vary in language and in style, being scholarly or simple, classical or Biblical, ornate or conversational, following the fashion of the time. Until the nineteenth century, Latin quotations were frequently given in the House of Commons. Now, Members of Parliament are an English-speaking brotherhood with peculiarities of accent and idiom which reveal their birthplace, their college or their calling.

The relative value of orators can best be judged by the testimony of those who heard them. We can trace the influence of oratory in Parliament by the improvement in the laws which gave additional security to life and property. National prosperity has been promoted by reasonable liberty preserved and defended by new political ideas which have been evolved by good common-sense profiting by experience, from century to century.

The course of political evolution can be traced by the influence of those ideas which, once powerfully expressed, have in course of time survived as the fittest. Through the growth of knowledge certain political ideas, though neglected for years, have become accepted as self-evident truths, and have gained dynamic power, by changes in public opinion. Many laws have embodied the results of prolonged debates in Parliament ; some ideas have changed sides. After being attacked by Conservatives and Liberals, they have been defended by both parties. In different periods, under the influence of moral and social forces which have been gradually developed, liberty has been extended and social order has been promoted.

The value of the evidence in the fragments preserved of orations and discussions has not been fully acknowledged. The spirit of the age in which the words were uttered can be discerned in some sentences. For through the speeches reported we come into closer contact with the men who moulded the opinions of their time than we can do by the study of the echoes of echoes which have come through the whispering gallery of the past. The best historians are liable to err by judging men and policies by the standards of their own time and in the interests

of the political party to which they belong. The words uttered by the orators of different periods are still potent, although they have lost the electrical influence of the atmosphere of the parliaments and associations in which they were first expressed, when they altered the convictions of opponents and hastened the evolution of many political ideas.

The play of personality is excited by the occasion on which the speaker addresses the House. The circumstances may inspire the orator ; and unpremeditated enthusiasm in defence or attack may do much to carry a point, to secure votes or to dethrone a ministry. The opinions of the historian concerning the influence of a statesman may be worthy of consideration, but they may not be accurate. We cannot cross-question the critics or the accused. The words which have come down as part of a speech delivered long ago deserve attention if we seek to discover the motives of the orator, the political life of the period, and what is probably true.

History deals with facts, and theories are only secondary. History has no scientific standpoint determined by abstract ideas. Every personality has character, but variations of attitude and choice are expected. We have

to alter our theories by the concrete experiences of life, among which are the surprising effects of strong emotions excited by gifted men, who have had many interests—personal, social and national—which they tried to protect. Every orator is a bundle of nerves and an electric battery, charged or discharged. He does not know what he ought to say or do every time he rises to speak ; but his words reveal more than the want of preparation. He cannot conceal his motives for a long period from his opponents, and they are on the watch for unsound thinking in his arguments and appeals.

In going backward from 1913 to 1213 we become conscious of an expansion and purification of national life in the present which calls for explanation. We look for the roots of the tree which bears good fruit in every part of the British Empire. Are they hidden in the past ? Political progress has resulted from the advocacy of certain ideas of justice and liberty ; and these ideas of righteousness survived long periods of wickedness in kings and barons, in priests and people.

The conscience of the nation never lost faith in the might of right. The need for protection for life and property was felt in the thirteenth century as well as in the twentieth century ;

but the Norman kings were not easily controlled. Absolute sovereignty and the divine right of certain kings to rule by the permission of the Pope were ideas widely disseminated. The problems of Church and State have been discussed for seven hundred years.

The arbitrary power was felt to be unbearable in the year 1213, when discontent was organised and the king was curbed by the barons, after much speech-making, deliberation and consideration. But the political ideas expressed in Magna Charta did not come at once into being at Runnymede. They had their roots in Roman law and Saxon tribal authority. The bitter experience of the Norman Conquest and the tyranny of King John revealed the need for restraining arbitrary power by combined forces. Ideas of law and order, acknowledged at Runnymede, grew out of the sense of justice which all men have. Thus, it may be said, the British Parliament met first on the banks of the Thames in the thirteenth century.

Every limitation of time has its disadvantages for a history of oratory. The years 1213 to 1913 are full of life and suggestion. The fragments of ancient speeches are not numerous. But the impressions made by orators on great occasions were long remembered, and good

results have followed their defence of right principles of government.

The expression in the Great Charter of certain political ideas gave ancient rights new vitality, and contributed to the life of the nation by securing to many of the people the right to be tried in a court of law. After Runnymede all classes were more conscious of common dangers by the provisions made in the Charter to protect life, liberty and property. We regard Stephen Langton as a political orator, defending the rights of the people. As a churchman, Langton knew something of the mind of Christ, and his political ideas were evolved from Holy Writ, perhaps more than he knew.

The evolution of political ideas has not been the design of any one statesman. But history does not point to a blind force ; and philosophy has taught us to seek for an intelligent cause for the survival of the fittest ideas and the gradual adjustment of the actual environment to the ideal. Some thinkers with Hegel give most weight to the "objective spirit, the self-realising idea which constantly embodies itself in her creations." Others point to the intellectual and moral power of the orators who have given expression to political ideas, and changed them according to the need of the country.

There are no self-realising ideas. In this history we seek to know the men who by their eloquence persuaded their fellows to vote for a certain policy. We wish to find out what talents they inherited and what skill they acquired by training, what they owed to wealth and opportunity and what they won by tact, earnestness and common-sense, as orators of commanding influence.

The first governors were warriors, rulers and kings, men of deeds.

The word Parliament suggests speech-making more than business. Before the French word came to England there had been Witenagemots. Wise men, Celtic and Saxon, had discussed the varied interests of the commonwealth, and we need to keep in mind the ordinary life of the people in order to understand the conditions of society which gave an audience to the speakers, prelates and barons, in the king's council. How did government by public opinion arise? Going to church or coming from the market-town men found opportunities of making their opinions a political force. Every week the shepherd meditated on his rights and the swineherd grumbled over his wrongs; the ploughman was sometimes the best speaker on the farm, and many times the blacksmith was the orator in the village.

In actual national life nothing stands isolated. The period of seven hundred years is only a fragment of a great whole, every portion of which contains signs of culture and progress in the past. Therefore the best history is imperfect, much must be left out, and friends of orators think that more space was deserved by them.

The evolution of political ideas has not been by leaps or great strides along one path. It has been a slow process, and by many zigzag movements difficult to follow at the time. Axioms began to be doubted. Old positions were no longer defended. New ideas were accepted when they were presented and enforced by some great speaker. The general opinion of his wisdom and reliability of character did more than the logical force of his arguments. Although one may grant that the state of mind in the audience was the product of centuries of culture, and without that prepared soil the seed of truth would not have borne fruit, yet we still may claim for the man and his message the influence of oratory—the combined effect of personal magnetism and logical ability to convince by enlightening the intellect and rousing the enthusiasm of those who, before the speech, were indifferent to the subject and inclined

not to vote. The resolution may have determined peace or war, and the political ideas may have been evolved by the experience of the futility of aggression or the need of defence.

A historical institution like Parliament has only a remote resemblance to a living organism. However, the evolution of political ideas by means of free discussion is visible in the history of the British constitution ; and it may be argued that every change in policy and legislation has altered the efficiency of Parliament, more or less. It is not dead yet. Perhaps it is more alive than ever before.

“ It is the peculiarity of living things not merely that they change under existing circumstances, but that any change which takes place in them is not lost but is, as it were, built into the organism, to serve as the foundation for future action.” ¹

Government by an absolute monarch may be best in certain circumstances ; but it has taken many centuries to develop the system of balancing opposing interests represented by the King, the Lords and the Commons in the British constitution. Without liberty to express the sense of injustice, and to secure opposition to the

¹ Prof. W. K. Clifford.

tyranny of kings and nobles, the people might still have been serfs. Thus history proves that, by the talents of orators, many reforms have been fostered through increase of knowledge and co-operation.

Ideas can change opinions ; and changed circumstances alter the purposes of many men, and determine the evolution of political ideas. The law of adaptation to circumstances can be traced in all periods of British history ; but we seek for the cause of each change in the influences—personal, economical and national—which have modified political ideas. If we look upon the discussions in Parliament as forces which shape public opinion, we may expect that ideas will be less angular after prolonged controversy, like the pebbles on the shore rounded by thousands of waves and tides.

This identity of aspiration and effort may be preserved through centuries, and prove the nexus of party combinations. Watchwords in our day are not like their first expressions. Repetition of similar words is not a proof that a speaker in 1913 thinks the same as the orators of the commonwealth.

National development is the result of many forces acting and reacting upon millions of

persons ; and the records of Parliament give the names of many statesmen and orators who, by changing their opinions, gave new power to the political ideas which they had adopted. Predictions of calamities in speeches have often been harmless although dark with forebodings

“ As when some great painter dips
His pencil in the gloom of earthquake and eclipse.”

A HISTORY OF ORATORY

CHAPTER I

ORATORY, ITS PLACE AND POWER

IN all popular assemblies where important business is transacted, and where the will of the majority rules, the influence of the orator is felt to be great. Clear thought and vigorous expression always command respect ; but it is only in countries blessed with free institutions that eloquence is power.

Oratory is hostile to tyranny, and despots know that the free utterance of opinion soon destroys their authority. The instinct of self-preservation leads them to fetter thought and limit eloquence to a narrow sphere ; but when the orator is chained down to adulation ; not allowed to protest or attack ; not permitted to defend the weak or expose the crimes of the strong ; when he is hired to flatter what he abhors, to eulogise the tyrant whom he would fain overthrow, to soothe into submission those whom he ought to rouse to revenge—then he loses his

dignity and power. Liberty is the parent of Eloquence—together they grow, together decline.

Where men are denied freedom of speech, political life is stifled—when the mouth is closed Liberty expires. In an absolute monarchy there is no encouragement to cultivate talents which often prove fatal to their possessor, for eminence is likely to bring more dangers than rewards in every state governed by one sovereign will. But in a democracy, where eloquence is the key to power, ambition will prompt many to learn the art of persuasion: and as the prizes of oratory become more valuable the number of competitors may be expected to increase.

The British Parliament has all along presented a most favourable arena for oratorical display, as questions of the greatest moment are submitted to the consideration of the House, and the free discussion of these gives ample opportunity for the exercise of the highest talent, while strict order and etiquette help to put a check on the prurient outgrowth of talkativeness. At a serious conjuncture of affairs, when peace or war, the safety or destruction of a nation, the consolidation or overthrow of a government may depend on the counsel given and the issue of a debate, trifling will not be tolerated; but on ordinary occasions every

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Member brave enough to run the gauntlet of criticism may express his opinion, and all who possess talking power are inclined to prove their ability to speak. So long as the first honours of the State may be won by successful speakers there is little danger of oratorical talent being allowed to rust.

Almost every session can boast of eloquent harangues ; and so many public men have been greeted by their friends as orators that it is difficult to determine the qualifications that merit the title. Is there any standard of excellence by which to judge what style of speech, what readiness of utterance, what power of argument, what degree of fervour and persuasive tact are requisite to raise a man from the crowded platform of public speakers to the select circle of orators ? Many effective speeches, trenchant with wit, seething with sarcasm, or powerful with the logic of facts, have not been delivered with any of the graces of elocution or adorned with a single flower of rhetoric. And others again, composed with the greatest care, every sentence polished and every thought pointed, but spoken by unknown individuals, have hardly been listened to with patience. It has often happened that a few words from a man respected for his virtue, his

age or experience, have destroyed the effect of a long and eloquent speech. The calm utterances of wisdom have won the suffrages of an audience which sat unmoved under a storm of declamation.

Few speeches have had much power the materials of which were not carefully arranged, and yet the prejudice against set speeches is so strong that many speakers have been tempted to forgo preparation altogether, lest they should be suspected of repeating a lesson, and so destroy their reputation.

WHAT THEN IS ORATORY?—Is it the dignity of the manner or the matter that distinguishes it from ordinary discourse?

Who is more competent than Mr Gladstone to answer these questions? "Unlike great poems, great speeches cannot be made, except in an age and place where they are understood and felt. The work of the orator is cast in the mould offered him by the mind of his hearers. He cannot follow nor frame ideals at his own will, his choice is to be what his time will have him, what it requires in order to be moved by him, or not to be at all."¹

There are so many modifying circumstances, and so many degrees of excellence, that it is

¹ Gladstone's "Homer," p. 341.

difficult to say wherein the charm and power of eloquence consist. It is not in pompous phraseology or violent gesticulation, as some imagine ; for simplicity, instead of being incompatible with oratory, has been a marked characteristic of some of its noblest efforts both in ancient and modern times. He has formed a false opinion of eloquence who thinks it must be accompanied with stage antics and embellishments. Intelligent men prefer sense to sound : they desire facts and reason ; and many suspect all the tricks of rhetoric so much that naked truth would be welcomed by them. It is plain that a style of speech fitted for one class of people might be quite inappropriate for others ; for one audience would be delighted with that which would disgust another. Hence many reputed orators have been unable to gain the ear of a cultured assembly ; for, not having the tact to conciliate, they had not the power to sway.

Wilkes and Tooke and O'Connell found that the arguments and appeals most effective in addressing a mob were quite worthless in the House of Commons ; and, on the other hand, neither Burke nor Pitt nor Fox could exercise a tithe of the influence over a promiscuous crowd that they could bring to bear on the

Members of Parliament. Biggar, Healy and Parnell met with a more enthusiastic reception in Cork and in Kilkenny than in the House of Commons.

The orator must adapt himself to his audience ; it is his business to seek the favour of men, and he will despise no art which may aid him to engage their attention and concentrate their interest on the subject he wishes to bring before them. He must have a purpose in speaking and speak to the purpose. Striving to persuade, to bring foes round to be friends and partisans, he will subordinate every means to that end. To accomplish his design he will try to touch every spring of human action, give reasons, rouse prejudices and kindle passions. When he wants to further a measure he will expound his views clearly and forcibly, set his arguments in array, and bring in his appeals in the manner suited to lead his hearers to coincide with him and act as he desires. To counteract an impression made by a rival he will endeavour to show the weakness of what has been advanced, establish the truth of his own statements or prove the expediency of what he proposes.

Without great mental power, a ready memory contributing facts of history and the results of research, without a lively imagination

presenting choice illustrations and a vigorous understanding able to grapple with arguments, detect fallacies and hold a firm grasp of a subject ; without intellectual skill to seize the chief thoughts and put them in the strongest light, without a command of language to preserve the stream of utterance unbroken, the speaker will not be prepared for every emergency of debate nor qualified to rank with the orators of the age. Formerly men settled their disputes not with their tongues, but with their swords ; they reserved their strength for the actual conflict of weapons. Probably tilts in the field were more dangerous than debates in the House, for sharp lances are more piercing than satire, and daggers more deadly than irony ; but the wounds in word warfare, though unseen, are not unfelt, and it still requires tact, talent and courage to defeat an opponent.

Every assault provokes an attack, and the orator has to stand many a blow, to take abuse pleasantly, and sheathe himself in patience and self-control. To enjoy the pleasures of victory he strives to conciliate the audience, for they are the arbiters ; and so, while running down his antagonist, he tries to turn the laugh against him. Wit is often more powerful than logic.

Oratory demands enthusiasm, and that which springs up from an earnest soul, fired with love of virtue and scorn of meanness, will be most powerful for good. Neither beauty of composition nor graceful delivery, neither point nor elegance, can compensate for the want of passion. Manly, vehement speaking commands attention, even although the sentences are not compact; but that which is uttered in a tone of indifference, although the phrases be all neatly turned, is likely to have little effect. A cold address can never be said to be eloquent.¹

The orator feels the force of what he speaks, and before he can inspire others with his thoughts and sentiments his soul must be kindled. Many of the faculties of the mind are half asleep. Some powers lie dormant for years, but passion awakens them all, and under healthy excitement the mind becomes conscious of energy unknown before.

The vigour which passion imparts to the speaker has a strange influence over his hearers, leading them to think as he thinks, and feel as he feels. At times so strong is the sympathy that, whatever measures or men the speaker dislikes or commends, these are detested or approved. It is thus that an eloquent speech

¹ Blair's "Lectures," XXV., vol. ii., p. 165, Ed. 1818.

may decide the fate of a political scheme ; for if men, while under the influence of such an harangue, are called upon to record their opinions, the majority are likely to vote with the orator. When Sheridan had concluded his speech on the " Begum Charge," so great was the excitement caused by it that the minister besought the House to adjourn the decision of the question, as being incapacitated from forming a just judgment under the influence of such powerful eloquence.¹

The fervour of Sheridan's eloquence was not greater than the readiness of his wit. Many good jokes of his have long been current. Having been annoyed several times by a gentleman expressing his concurrence in an indiscreet way, he painted a monster of perfidy and vulgarity and concluded by asking :

" Where shall we find such a man ? "

" Hear, hear ! " cried the important M.P.

Sheridan paused, turned and bowed, saying the House was certainly obliged to him for the information.

The more natural oratory is, the more effective ; for art is most revealed where most concealed. That speech tells which seems to come from the heart.

¹ Lord Brougham, " Statesmen of George III.," vol. ii., p. 31, Ed. 1845.

Character determines the value of speech. If a man be not accredited honest his words may be eloquent but they will fail to convince. Sometimes, however, craft and skill may overcome prejudice, and even triumph over passionate earnestness. The bowed head and outstretched hand and promising silence arrested the attention of that audience which had listened impatiently to the burning words of a brave chieftain: Ajax lost his cause by insisting too much, by want of deceit and scorn of art; Ulysses governed his enemies by counsel; and skill conquered strength.

Such contests are not uncommon in the British Parliament, for the honours of office are very attractive, and many members would like to be ministers. But claims of high birth and personal worth do not always raise the aspirant to a seat in the Administration, for a talented man, however lowly his rank, is a powerful rival.

The orator often wins the day, even when competing with peers of ancient lineage. Aristocratic as Parliament is, it recognises the gift of eloquence as a patent of nobility. Pitt and Peel, Brougham and Macaulay are notable examples of great talent and the commanding

influence of oratory. Many others might be mentioned who owed their promotion to eloquence.

After the passing of the Bill for the Total Abolition of Slavery, Lord Althorp said to Dr Lushington: "Well, you and Buxton have wielded a power too great for any individuals in the House"¹; and when the Duke of Wellington saw the Premier, Lord Grey, speaking to Buxton he said: "I see what the influence is under which you are; and if that individual is to have more power than Lords and Commons both—we may as well give up the Bill."²

Such acknowledgments, unwittingly given, to the power of an able speaker, go far to prove the influence of oratory. Able advocacy of a good cause carried it through every barrier of interest and prejudice which opposed its triumph. The great measure in relation to Ireland which embodies the work of the session of 1881 is a signal example of the influence of oratory.

The need for Land Reform was long felt, but it was the speeches in Mid-Lothian which educated the country and quickened the political zeal of both parties. But if the supporters of the

¹ "Memoirs of Buxton," p. 281.

² *Ibid.*, p. 282.

measure had not been enthusiastic, devoted, persevering men, whom ridicule could not daunt nor opposition subdue—men able to demonstrate the justice of their cause and eloquent enough to impress others with their convictions—their efforts would not have been crowned with success.

CHAPTER II

THE QUALIFICATIONS OF THE ORATOR

THE influence of oratory is bound up with that of the orator. In none of the fine arts is the connection of the artist with his work so intimate as in that of oratory. That is the root of one of the difficulties that beset the parliamentary critic of eloquence, for Cato's definition of an orator, "*vir bonus dicendi peritus*," would exclude many who have been skilled in speaking. Many have been eloquent who could not be called good; but all admit that the power of a virtuous life increases mightily the orator's influence.

The history of British oratory furnishes many proofs of this. Sir John Legard thus wrote to Wilberforce: "The success of the motion seemed doubtful" (Lord Melville's case was the subject of discussion), "or rather, I believe, appearances indicated that it would be thrown out, when you rose, and supported by a well-earned reputation for integrity and independence, made a speech, which at the time was said to influence forty votes."¹ Again, when

¹ "Life of Wilberforce," p. 326.

he was preparing to speak on the Catholic Emancipation question, Sir J. Flood said to Wilberforce: "Your opinion has more weight than that of half the House besides."¹ Doubtless this was an extravagant statement, but it indicated the influence Wilberforce had acquired by his probity of character.

Take another example of the power and influence of character, in a very different man. It is said that Docherty was the only Irish representative O'Connell ever quailed before in debate. The certainty that Docherty's manly frankness and genial good humour would predispose so many in his favour, and the knowledge that no provocation could disturb the temper of one who felt that his honour was unassailable, made O'Connell more than reluctant to attack him.

Once the great Dan forgot this prudence and Docherty replied, for nearly an hour. "It was a complete triumph and as a victory over O'Connell it stands pre-eminently the most signal ever achieved in the English House of Commons."²

Emerson says: "The moral element will and must be allowed for, will and must work.

¹ "Life of Wilberforce," p. 407

² *Cornhill*, p. 318, March 1870.

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Eloquence is the best speech of the best souls.”¹

“It is the appropriate organ of the highest personal energy. Personal ascendance may exist with or without adequate talent for its expression.”

When a man has won the reputation of being an eloquent speaker he has achieved a great deal, for he will then be listened to eagerly and respectfully. Wisdom will prompt him to practise Spartan brevity. Economy of words may increase their value. As second-rate speeches would hurt his fame the orator will seldom speak on any subject which he has not carefully studied ; and as the smell of the lamp rather injures the effect, he will endeavour in his speech to incorporate the ideas that the course of the debate may have suggested. Nevertheless the greater coherence and clearness that result from labour bestowed on the composition sometimes make it easy for the critics to discover the parts prepared. However, the number of sharp critics in an audience is never very great. Skilful orators husband their strength ; on common themes they speak like common men—great occasions are needed to call forth great energies.

¹ “Essays,” p. 343.

“There is always a rivalry between the orator and the occasion, between the demands of the hour and the prepossessions of the individual.”¹

But the orator need never be at a loss for a subject if Cicero was right in saying that “the real power of eloquence is such, that it embraces the origin, the influence, the changes of all things in the world, all virtues, duties and all nature so far as it affects the manners, minds, and lives of mankind. It can give an account of customs, laws and rights, can govern a state, and speak on everything relating to any subject whatsoever with elegance and force.”²

The records of the speeches of the British Parliament almost warrant this comprehensive range for the orator's powers. Who could enumerate the subjects of debate? The dominion of the Crown, the powers of the senate and the rights of the subject; party struggles, class privileges and personal grievances, embassies, marriages and alliances; the birth of princes and the death of kings; discoveries, conquests, emigration and colonisation; treaties of commerce, opening of markets and regulations of trade; responsibilities of ministers at home and governors abroad; crimes and

¹ Emerson.

² “De Oratore,” B. III., c. xx.

cruelties, national and individual; war and peace; armies and navies; revenue and expenditure; taxes and loans; corn laws and drink licences: the reform of existing statutes and continual legislation for the health and happiness—the social, intellectual, moral and religious welfare—of nations and kindreds, the allies or subjects of an empire the interests of which are affected by every wind that blows and every cloud that darkens the political sky—such are the themes on which British orators discourse.

We have looked at oratory from several standpoints, and by considering the manifold varieties of theme and methods of treatment, the spheres in which eloquence is most potent and the causes modifying its influence, we have seen something of the general scope of the subject.

No positive photographs of the ideal orator come out well, nor are the negatives at all satisfactory even when taken by the best artists. Cicero “accounted him a *good speaker* who could express his thoughts with accuracy and perspicuity, according to the ordinary judgment of mankind, before an audience of moderate capacity; but him alone *eloquent* who could in a more admirable and noble manner amplify and adorn whatsoever subjects he chose,

and who embraced in thought and memory all the principles of everything relating to oratory.”¹

Measured by the standards of antiquity the majority of British orators would be found to rise very little above the level of good speakers. When Hume wrote the following passage, the men who became the brightest ornaments of British eloquence were only entering on their public life and had not displayed their powers ; but it may serve to tone down the highly coloured descriptions of native oratory in which the friends of the speakers are apt to express their admiration.

Hume says : “ In enumerating the great men who have done honour to our country, we exult in our poets and philosophers, but what orators are ever mentioned ? or where are the monuments of their genius to be met with ? There are found indeed, in our histories, the names of several who directed the resolutions of our Parliament ; but neither themselves nor others have taken the pains to preserve their speeches : and the authority which they possessed seems to have been owing to their experience, wisdom or power more than to their talents for oratory. None of them have attained much beyond a mediocrity in their art,* and the styles of

¹ “ De Oratore,” B. I., c. xxi.

eloquence which they aspire to give no exercise to the sublimer faculties of the mind, but may be reached by ordinary talents and a slight application.”¹

The inferiority of the moderns in oratory is generally admitted, for we cannot point to many speeches of such surpassing excellence as the ancients have bequeathed. The genius of some nations may have been crushed by despotic government, but this cannot be said of Britain ; on the contrary, there have been great inducements to cultivate eloquence ; and yet, whether owing to the greater accuracy of modern thinking or a disposition to distrust oratorical displays, whether from the gloomy influences of our northern climate or the dullness of our national character, modern eloquence is not so embellished or vehement as was that of Cicero or Demosthenes. Our speeches in debate are more instructive but less impassioned than those of the ancients.

In Parliament, “ the speaking required is of a very peculiar kind ” (as a member writing to a friend in 1819 remarks) ; “ the House loves *good sense and joking*, and nothing else ; and the object of its utter aversion is that species of eloquence which may be called Philip-
ppian.

¹ Essay No. 13, vol. i., p. 91, Ed. 1788.

There are not three men from whom a fine simile or sentiment would be tolerated ; all attempts of the kind are punished with general laughter. An easy flow of sterling, forcible, plain sense is indispensable.”¹

If such was the temper of the House at the close of the Georgian era—by many regarded as the brightest in the annals of British eloquence—how is it to-day ? It may be wrong to suppose that the greater proportion of the members before the Reform Bill were men of thorough education and refined taste who could appreciate good speaking. Some of them had applauded Burke and Sheridan, Pitt and Fox. Are we to ascribe the present preference for plain fare to a natural reaction of taste ? As a general characteristic of the Victorian age, men valued speeches by the quantity of good sense and joking which they contained. The dislike of fine speaking, unless first-rate, was not peculiar to that time, although it might then be more marked.

Lord Chesterfield finds the true definition of a good speaker to be no more than this : “A man of good common sense who reasons justly, and expresses himself elegantly on that subject on which he speaks.”

¹ Buxton's “Memoirs.”

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A distinguished Member of Parliament thus writes : " For one plain orator of this simple school we have a dozen or more of fluent, florid declaimers. And no wonder, for the imagination is a much more precocious faculty than the understanding ; and whenever the one is unable to exercise its authority, the other having no power of self-restraint indulges undue licence. Rhetoric, therefore, is common ; and real eloquence is rare, because imagination is abundant, while sense and the power of reasoning are perhaps the rarest gifts of Providence. . . . A man of any information or sense, however dull, prolix or ungainly, will be listened to with respect . . . while the mere rhetorician or impudent pretender will be encountered with derision or silent contempt. The justice of the House of Commons is indisputable ; its manly spirit is such as becomes the representatives of the people of the United Kingdom, its fine taste properly belongs to an assembly in which scholars and gentlemen predominate.¹ "

Since the passing of the Reform Bill, and the admission of true representatives of borough constituencies, the House has become intensely practical. " It comes to transact business, not

¹ " History of England," by William Massey, M.P., pp. 544 and 545

to be amused ; for that it has the theatre or the last new novel. It has railway-bills, local-government bills, and free-trade dogmas to uphold or oppose ; and its time is too precious to be wasted on prepared perorations or magnificent exordiums. It requires something practical ; prefers figures of arithmetic to figures of rhetoric, and pounds, shillings and pence to poetry. Great questions it treats to a *cui bono* ? It knows nothing about first principles, nor can it calculate remote consequences, but it can tell to a shilling how much it will gain or lose within a month by a proposed change. There is a shrewd common sense—the commonest sense, that of self-interest—about it, which makes the art of the orator a dangerous one, if he be intent on dazzling or astonishing. Insensibly the quality of contemporaneous eloquence has become deteriorated in order to meet the taste of these influential men.”¹

The infusion of the commercial and sternly practical spirit has cooled down the temperature of the House so much that talent, instead of being forced, hardly finds warmth enough to cause it to germinate. The noble aspirations after the welfare of the race, the philosophic theories founded on broad and lofty views of its

¹ G. H. Francis, “ Orators of the Age,” p. 19.

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possible destiny, and the nervous and chaste language in which these thoughts were clothed gave a high tone and abiding beauty to many of the speeches of the Georgian era. But the novelty of the great principles which engaged attention at the beginning of the nineteenth century has worn off: these principles are not now disputed, and much of the work of Parliament, since the passing of the Reform Bill, has been to adapt them to particular cases—local and national.

Amid the endless bickerings about the profit of small things and the mutual concessions about details there has been little room of late for the exercise of the orator's special talents in defending great principles; and it would be unfair to blame the men of the present age, considering the altered circumstances, for not surpassing in eloquence those of the former.

CHAPTER III

THE INFLUENCE OF ORATORY IN PARLIAMENT

THERE IS always a fascination in personal encounters, which gives them a kind of dramatic power ; and many of the orations of the Georgian Parliament owed much of the interest they excited to the known animosity of the speakers. Personalities are not so common in the modern House ; as a rule measures, not men, are the objects of attack ; but now and again the veterans burnish their intellectual arms and astonish honourable gentlemen with the power of their weapons and the marks of their blows. When the Cumberland baronet, Sir James Graham, referred to Mr Disraeli as " the Red Indian of debate, fond of the scalping knife," or when the latter gentleman spoke of Mr Roebuck's intemperate vigour and envious bitterness as his " Sadler's Wells sarcasms " and " melodramatic malignity "—the rivalry of the men and the propriety of the epithets stamped them on the memory of all who heard them. Such passages of arms always excite interest, for the play of natural feeling gives

the charm of eloquence to the speaker who defends himself. These encounters are not now so common as they used to be.

Public men must serve before they can expect to rule the public. To be considered trustworthy may be more profitable than to be reckoned a great orator, liable to be carried away by enthusiasm from the well-trodden paths of mediocrity. If level speaking secure more votes than eloquence even those who could rise high will keep low and affect to despise the arts of oratory.

Sir Robert Peel is said to have acted on this principle, often assuming very undignified postures—standing with his hands behind his coat tails, or his thumbs buried in the pockets of his waistcoat, and one leg over the other—as if addressing a friend on a trivial matter, even when explaining important transactions to Parliament.¹ The composition of his speeches was frequently characterised by the same slovenliness, the only plan of construction evident being disorder, intentional want of arrangement. Many have followed his example, but few have equalled him in the skilful management of the House of Commons. Lord Palmerston did wonders in the same sphere. He

¹ Francis, "Orators," p. 41.

attained and maintained his exalted position by virtue of a plentiful supply of good sense and joking ; and speeches in which these abound will always find favour in a Parliament which truly represents national feelings.

Are many worthy to be called orators ? May all the leaders of parties and the statesmen who have guided the affairs of the country, and have expounded their policy in a winning way, be acknowledged as British orators ? Are we warranted in recognising every speaker as an orator who persuades his audience to adopt a specific course of conduct ? Since the fashions of oratory change so often, how are we to select a standard to guide us in our historical researches ? There seems to be no other means of judging the eloquence of speeches than that of the effect produced. Of the thousands of skilful speakers who have attended Parliament, the names of only a few are remembered, and we shall look for those who were remarkable for eloquence or took a prominent part in the debates at critical periods of our history.

The quarrels of kings and the struggles of the baronial houses occupy the foreground of English history. The march of armies and the doings and sayings of their leaders are carefully recorded, but the progress of civilisation,

and the words of those who guided the councils of the realm and formed its laws, are seldom chronicled. In praising the soldier many forget the honour due to the statesman. Every historian seeking to trace the influence of a pet principle is apt to overrate its importance and overlook the effects of the agencies co-working with it. Many causes combine to produce political changes and—

“ It is not to be thought that the flood
Of British Freedom, which to the open sea
Of the world’s praise from dark antiquity,
Hath flowed with pomp of waters unwithstood.
Road by which all might come and go that would
And bear out freights of worth to foreign lands,
That this most famous stream ”—¹

should owe its origin alone to the well-springs of Eloquence, or any other single fountain. Valour has done much, and oratory has contributed its share.

Military triumphs have put those of eloquence so much in the shade that it is difficult to gather the materials for a history of British oratory. Of the twenty thousand statutes that define our liberties and preserve our rights very few were enacted without a discussion of their merits, and we may regard their present shape

¹ Wordsworth.

as records of compromise in many a word-warfare. Our laws have been the result of persuasion for the last seven hundred years, and, since the Three Estates have required to agree before any measure could become law, may we not claim all the good and bad effects of legislation as proofs of the influence of oratory?

The stability of the constitution has been secured by the dependence of each department of Government on the others. Check and countercheck, like the rival forces of nature, are intended to keep each order in its own orbit. The Lords check the people; the King, both the Lords and the Commons; and the people both the Lords and the King. By a combination of these elements of government, many of the dangers peculiar to each have been avoided. The different interests have served to maintain the equilibrium; for the balance of powers has not yet resulted from the passivity of any but the activity of all.

Thinkers, in the long run, are the rulers of the world; and orators are their prime ministers.

Nowadays we are so accustomed to speeches of all degrees of temperature, from the fiery denunciation to the cold reply, that we are apt to underestimate their importance and overlook their influence. It seems strange to us that

the eloquence of a simple monk could originate the Crusades ; that Mirabeau could destroy the French monarchy and marshal the forces of the French Revolution ; that O'Connell could by his eloquence rouse the national spirit in Ireland, and so win the sympathies of his countrymen as, in a manner, to become their dictator ; these things seem strange, but they are only illustrations of the influence of oratory.

Accustomed to regard speeches as safety valves, we are apt to forget that they have often been agents of combustion piling up the fuel of thought and passion. Some orators have set political passion on fire. Some by eloquence have moved multitudes till empires heaved to and fro, till nations were overturned, till " castles toppled on their warder's head," till the foundations of society—the lintels of the cottage and the pillars of the throne—were shattered. Enthusiasm aroused by the words of a fiery soul in a short speech or a long oration may be more effective than a charge of dragoons.

Occasionally great principles and original thoughts, fresh from the mint of the orator's mind and with the stamp of his intellect upon them, are put into the general currency ; and long after the personal marks are worn away the thoughts circulate as common coins of

truth. It is impossible to trace the secret influence of such thoughts, and yet we have only to remember the effect that single phrases and words have often had in the decision of popular questions to be conscious of their importance—*e.g.* Lord Lyndhurst's "aliens in language, religion and blood" gave dangerous strength to the Repeal Association.

It is true that the power exercised by speakers in quickening and modifying popular aspirations may be attributed to the thinker, as such ; but, on the other hand, many of these thoughts would have been buried in oblivion had the orator not brought them forth and given them the prestige of his fame. However, the most effective speeches have not been those that embodied many new ideas ; for novelties are timorously received as motives to action. Those speeches that collected the thoughts ripening in the minds of the people, and gave them nobler utterance than they had previously, have been most dynamic ; for then the orator was only the mouthpiece of public opinion, and could count on the strongest support. Doubtless it is in the large assembly that the influence of the orator is most manifest, when he keeps his hearers hanging on his lips by the charm of thought in word and action. But it would be

wrong to overlook ulterior effects, for, long after the sound of the voice dies away, the thoughts live and breed changes manifold.

In modern times the influence of the orator is increased a thousandfold and perpetuated, as well as multiplied, by the Press. While the listeners to a speech might not be a hundred, its readers might be numbered by thousands. Wilkes was once addressing the House when a friend advised him to desist as no one was giving heed. But his reply was: "Speak it I must, for it has been printed in the newspapers this half-hour."¹ This extreme case illustrates the influence of a speech outside of Parliament, where the demagogue could reckon on the applause of the multitude for whom he spoke.

Public opinion without doubt is often greatly influenced by the debates in Parliament. For the speech read becomes the subject of conversation in the club, the institute, the market, the shop, and in every place of public resort; and the opinions of the orator quickly find many advocates and opponents.

It might be said that this influence is akin to that of an editor, or contributor to the newspapers; but it differs in the degree of interest excited by the authority of the speaker and the

¹ Quoted by Brougham.

position he occupies in Parliament, or in the Government. The best leading article written anonymously is passed over without much attention, while a rambling discourse by an official personage may be carefully read. The speech has the charm of individuality, and that often outweighs the merits of a clever article. An admirable essay sometimes makes but a poor speech; and many a speech spoiled by an awkward, affected delivery shows to best advantage in the columns of the newspaper. There the eloquence of the composition is perceived, and the scope of the reasoning can be calmly considered.

The reader of Burke's works, as he passes on with ever-increasing admiration from paragraph to paragraph, is apt to imagine that every M.P. would be in his place, and every eye riveted on the orator when Burke spoke; and yet we are told that the House thinned whenever he rose to address it, for he had not the gift of delivery.¹ Burke's printed speeches have been ranked among the models of composition, and his works have had a powerful influence in forming the opinions as well as the style of many eminent politicians and statesmen.

Macaulay's speeches and essays may be

¹ Massey, vol. i, p. 55.

ranked in the same class. Probably their influence will increase with the spread of education, for in studying their style the student imbibes their thoughts, and thus their influence is perpetuated from generation to generation.

But is it fair to ascribe this influence to their oratory? It is derived from their works, in the same way as that of accomplished thinkers and authors, who have become famous in literature. How can we distinguish the influence of oratory? It is hard to mark the boundary where that of literature begins and that of oratory ceases.

Take Burke's work on the French Revolution and the unparalleled effect made by it, and the speeches that accompanied it, on the public mind, both in 1790 and since that time, in arresting the progress of unbridled democratic principles. Can it be supposed that thirty thousand copies would have been sold in a few months if the work had been the production of some obscure individual? Was it not the high political position which Burke had gained by his eloquence which gave weight to his opinions? Was it not the fame of his oratory which gave wings to his thoughts? If so it was, had not oratory an influence on the effects produced—in the breaking up of the Whig party and the stemming of Jacobinism?

Macaulay's works in like manner had a valuable introduction and prestige from the parliamentary fame of their author as an orator.

Disraeli's fame as an orator increased the popularity of his works.

Oratory cannot be studied profitably as an abstraction, nor explained by definition. Many things combine to produce the magnetic spell, and many orations are prepared in different ways, for time and place vary. Some speakers can turn on this heat, light and welding power of persuasion and unite hundreds.

Fox by long practice could speak on the spur of the moment. But Burke and many orators prepared carefully by writing beforehand. Disraeli did so with his most important speeches—"a fact which greatly enhances the pleasure of their perusal. Macaulay followed the same practice, and it is said that the excessive elaboration of his oratory sometimes weakened its effect." Lord Randolph Churchill's earlier speeches were all memorised in this fashion."¹

Many times promises of money and place and power have been more influential than the eloquent appeals of orators. There have been periods when the Crown officers and the lords

¹ "Mother of Parliaments," p. 220.

who were patrons of pocket-burghs did not conceal the influence they had over members of the House of Commons.

The power of social prestige has always been felt; and woman's influence in the drawing-room has been potent every year. Great ladies have by their invitations altered the atmosphere of political persuasion. To analyse all the forces which contribute to the divisions in the Houses of Parliament would require more than human insight into the hearts of men and women. This bribery of a smile, a touch of the hand and a glance of the eye cannot be denied; and when desired these influences tell upon political parties and defeat the calculations of the whips of the House. But these gentle forms of persuasion, which no man condemns, should not be called bribery.

There have been periods when bribery was much more influential than oratory. On 6th April 1780 this resolution was moved by Mr Dinning, "that the influence of the Crown has increased, is increasing and ought to be diminished."¹ If we ask why, we may read in "The Mother of Parliaments" particulars of unconcealed sinister influences—*e.g.* "In 1690 the practice regarding the bribery of members

¹ "Mother of Parliaments," by Harry Graham, p. 9.

of the House of Commons was undertaken by the Speaker, Sir John Trevor, on behalf of the Tory Party.”¹

Before the extension of the Franchise the Lords had great influence over some members of the House of Commons. The peers had many seats in their gift. “In 1815 the House of Commons contained 471 members, who were the creatures of 144 peers and 123 commoners. Only 171 members were actually elected by the people’s vote.”²

The sinister influence of their patrons was most potent with many members. “Walpole is said to have stated that he did not care a rap who made Members of Parliament so long as he was allowed to deal with them after they were made.”³

Human nature has a corrupt side, and in all ages and countries evil has been fighting against the good in public and private affairs. Increasing popular power has lessened aristocratic influence, for a man willing to buy all the votes in a large constituency would require to be more than a millionaire. And there are some righteous men who cannot be bribed.

¹ “Mother of Parliaments,” by Harry Graham, p. 9.

² *Ibid.*, p. 11.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

Is oratory still influential? Do debates really influence votes?

We have proof that they do sometimes.

The ostensible motives of justice, principle and patriotism, fanning the earnestness of the speakers, have been in many cases only used to conceal the designs of personal ambition. Therefore some men begin to inquire what interest the advocate has in getting a measure passed, or what profit its defeat will bring to its opponents? However difficult it may be to discover the springs of political intrigue, it is often asserted that the majority of votes are moved by them and not by the arguments or appeals of the orators. Although there be some truth in this, yet there are so many Members who set themselves to judge the particular question on its merits that their votes may turn the scale.

It is matter of fact that "the general business of Parliament is materially affected by the course of debate, and frequently by particular speeches." Mr Massey, M.P., says: "Among numerous instances which have fallen under my own observation, during my short experience of Parliament, I may mention Lord Hotham's Bill for disqualifying persons holding certain judicial offices for seats in the House of Commons.

The Bill was carried through its first stage by a considerable majority, notwithstanding the opposition of the Government. But on the second reading the Bill was rejected by a majority as decisive. This result was entirely owing to a speech from Mr Macaulay. No attempt was made by the supporters of the Bill to answer his argument, and its effect was manifest in the division which almost immediately followed.”¹

Many instances from our earlier history could easily be given—*e.g.* on the Regency question, in 1788, Lord North’s motion was supported by the whole strength of the Opposition, led by Fox. That orator closed his speech by a fierce invective against Pitt, which would doubtless have swayed the minds of many to evince their anger had not Pitt made a happy reply, so able that it counteracted the former and made such an impression in his favour that the amendment was negatived by a majority of sixty-four; considering that a change of ministry was expected almost daily, and considering all the means employed to prevent such a turn of fortune, the result was most surprising, as an effect of a powerful speech.² Windham’s defence

¹ “History of England,” vol. i., p. 551.

² Massey, vol. iii., p. 364.

of the Government in 1792 in reply to Fox may also be cited ; it carried a majority of two hundred and forty for the Address."

The whole history of Parliament testifies to the influence of orators. Almost every great measure has owed much to their personal influence.

CHAPTER IV

THE BEGINNINGS OF PARLIAMENT

BEFORE the Saxons came in the sixth century to Britain, there were councils, courts, churches and rules of government. The existence of law and the administration of justice are proofs of a divine instinct in mankind, seeking what is good. Although Might and Right, the force of arms and the power of truth, have often been in conflict, yet sometimes they have been allied in promoting the progress of liberty and righteousness.

The history of oratory in the years before the Plantagenets is not extensive. Probably the laws of ecclesiastical discussion ruled the debates, for many of the speakers were churchmen.

Periods of seven hundred years mark in the history of England great changes in civilisation, and enable us to compare the influence of the warrior, the teacher and the producer. Good speakers belonging to the aristocracy and the clergy relied on their appeals to reason and the common-sense of justice. May we regard as orators all the advocates of the rights of the

people, to whatever rank or class they belonged, who have persuaded courts and councils, and who in public meetings of various kinds have exercised the influence of oratory?

The outstanding event of 1211 was an act of violence by King John, one of many recorded of his wickedness and tyranny. Matilda, the wife of William de Braosse, their son and their son's wife were sent to Windsor Castle, and by King John's orders starved to death in a dungeon. He had exacted in 1203 a seventh part of the movables of all his subjects. They regarded this as robbery. "Being arrogant in prosperity, abject in adversity, the King neither conciliated affection in the one, nor esteem in the other. His dissimulation was so well known that it seldom deceived."¹ In 1213, after an interdict of a year, Pope Innocent III. deposed King John as an unworthy king. Such events were known all over the Christian world and talked about by peasants and peers in England.

Notwithstanding despotic rule, disregard for law and repression of liberty, public opinion was a political force in 1211, and during the next four years it prepared the Magna Charta. The character and courage of Stephen Langton, Cardinal and Archbishop of Canterbury, must

¹ Lingard.

be taken into account in estimating his influence as an orator. He was an Englishman of the best type of ecclesiastics who know the world. Langton was educated at the university of Paris. His sense of duty was stronger than his reverence for the Pope or the King ; and before granting absolution to King John he made him swear " that he would abolish all illegal customs, that he would restore the good laws of his predecessors, especially King Edward's ; that he would give just and true judgments to all men and that he would restore to all their rights." ¹

When King John, with foreign mercenaries, had marched to Northampton, Langton met him and told him that his barbarous violence was a direct breach of his oath. John replied : " Rule you the Church and leave me to govern the State." ²

At St Paul's, London, 25th August 1213, John called a council of the prelates and barons, and Langton found there an opportunity to form a confederacy to curb the power of the oppressor. Langton spoke warmly against King John, saying there " was clear evidence of his ill designs and therefore it was absolutely necessary for the good of the public to press him to per-

¹ Creasy, " History of Constitution," p. 114.

² *Ibid.*, p. 116.

form his engagements. But as difficulties might occur in the particulars to be required of the King, a charter might be used of one of their former Kings, of which he had fortunately found a copy, notwithstanding the plans taken to bury it in oblivion.”¹ It was a charter of King Henry I. that he had discovered.

The oratory of Langton induced all the barons then present to take an oath to struggle for their liberties, if need were even unto the death. He was the guiding spirit of all their conferences. We find him explaining what the demands of the barons were to the King at Oxford; and John’s reply may serve as an example of the brevity, blasphemy and fury of the King’s speeches of those days.

“And why do they not demand my crown also? By God’s teeth, I will not grant them liberties that will make me a slave.”²

It was needless to waste words on one whose conscience was scared by a multitude of heinous transgressions against every law human and divine. It was well for our country that the barons were able to maintain their right by their might. Tyrants whom no orator

¹ “*Rapin de Thoyras*,” vol. i., b. viii., p. 273. Ed. London, 1732.

² “*Creasy on the Constitution*,” p. 123.

would persuade submit to the eloquence of deeds.

When the archbishop told them that he had discovered a charter of Henry I. the barons pledged themselves to struggle for their ancient liberties, even to death.¹ The date of the Great Charter, 15th June 1215, was that of the first day of the Congress of Runnymede. Numerous controversies are indicated in its clauses, for the absolute power of the Norman kings had been often called in question, and the debates about the supremacy of the Crown or the Church had been carried on for years. The essential clauses, thirty-nine and forty, protect the personal liberty and property of all freemen by giving security from arbitrary imprisonment and arbitrary spoliation.²

Without the influence of Langton the liberties would not have been so clearly stated and defended, for all classes, rich or poor, Normans and Saxons. "*Nullus liber homo*, these three words," said Lord Chatham, 9th January 1770, "have a meaning which interests us all—they are worth all the classics. It is to your ancestors, my lords—it is to the English barons that we are indebted for the laws and constitution we possess. Their virtues were rude

¹ Creasy, p. 117.

² Hallam, xi. 324.

and uncultivated, but they were great and sincere. Their understandings were as little polished as their manners, but they had hearts to distinguish right from wrong, they had heads to distinguish truth from falsehood ; they understood the rights of humanity and they had spirit to maintain them."

It is not needful to trace the roots of constitutional history back to the Saxon or the Celtic periods in British history. For the year 1213 is earlier than the first Parliament ; and we find in the origin of the words—"Oratory in Parliament"—Latin or French roots which remind us of Normans more than of Saxons or Celts.

Before the thirteenth century the divisions of the inhabitants made a national Parliament impossible, because a common language is a necessity for the orator's influence over his hearers. Macaulay and Creasy fix upon the date of the Great Charter as the commencement of the history of the English nation. "From that time forth no part of the population of England looks on another part as foreigners ; all feel that they are one people, and that they jointly compose one of the states of Christendom. In the thirteenth century, our English language, such as it still is, became the

mother tongue of every Englishman.”¹ The proclamation of Henry III. to the people of Huntingdonshire in 1258 is considered the first specimen of the English language, as distinguished from the Saxon and semi-Saxon.

We shall endeavour to trace the influence of the orator throughout the constitutional history “which deals with the living body of the State in its origin, its life and its progress, and the succession and unbroken evolution of enactments which have remained in force until the present day.”²

There were many attempts at government in the thirteenth century before the Three Estates of the Realm were regularly summoned for the consideration of national affairs. The counties and the cities were recognised for purposes of taxation and deliberation; but the monarch, the prelates and the barons preserved their privileges as long as they could.

“In 1261 Simon de Montfort summoned three Knights from each county to a deliberation upon the ‘State business’ whilst the King invited the same deputies to his council at Windsor. But after Henry III. had been taken prisoner, Simon de Montfort summoned in the King’s name two

¹ Creasy, p. 14.

² Dr Rudolph Grieses.

Knights from each county, and two citizens from a number of townships to a national council on the 28th January 1265, and so in a certain sense this epoch may be said to close with the birth of the Lower House."¹

The lesser vassals and the freeholders had for the first time been combined into a body, and had the consciousness that to them belonged under certain circumstances a share in the King's Council. There the man skilled in speaking found his sphere of influence.²

We are deeply indebted to the educated men who guided the valour of the barons, and to the influence of oratory in the discussions. We would not say that the Charter resulted solely from the fruition of the feelings that Langton indicated and excited, for the King's tyranny, perfidy and meanness had piled up the angry passions of his subjects so that a spark could kindle them; but, if oratory was not the principal agent in fashioning the keystone of our freedom, no one can deny that it had a hand in it, and we claim for eloquence a share of the honour due to the work.

The general council of the realm, before the time of Henry III., was composed of barons

¹ "Constitutional History of England," vol. i., p. 330.

² *Ibid.*, p. 332.

and prelates, but in 1265 knights of the shire and deputies from the cities and boroughs were admitted into Parliament. We find the beginning of that long chain of conditions by which grievances have been redressed and the power of the purse made the "shield of liberty," in the Parliament on 11th February 1225, requiring the confirmation of the former charters before granting the tax of the fifteenth that the King demanded. We know not how those that proposed the plan advocated the advantages which would result from its adoption, but, considering the importance of the precedent in establishing a principle that has wrought so well, the speeches would have been worthy of a place in a history of British oratory.

Edward I., in raising money to defray the expenses of his numerous wars, had acted violently and arbitrarily; indeed by temperament he was a prince likely to desire to have all things his own way and to do all in his power to carry out his designs. He was crafty in council as well as brave in battle, and it required uncommon wisdom and valour to frustrate his attempts to domineer. But there were men among the barons fit for the task. The memory of two will always be held sacred. It is Hallam who says: "I do not know that England has

ever produced any patriots to whose memory she owes more gratitude than Humphrey Bohun, Earl of Hereford and Essex, and Roger Bigod, Earl of Norfolk.”¹

In the twenty-fifth year of Edward's reign the statute called “*Confirmatio Chartarum*” was passed. Cap. VI. runs as follows:—
 “Moreover, we have granted for us and our heirs, as well to archbishops, bishops, abbots, priors and other folk of holy church, as also to earls, barons and to all the commonality of the land, that for no business from thenceforth, we shall take such manner of aids, tasks, nor prises, but by the common consent of all the realm, and for the common profit thereof, saving the ancient aids and prises due and accustomed.”²

Thus all private property was secured from royal spoliation. In the success of these attempts to bridle regal ambition we can detect evidences of the power of mind and tongue that must have been exercised in persuading the barons to assert their rights and unite in maintaining them.

The foundations of our liberties were firmly laid during the thirteenth century, for the

¹ Vol. ii., p. 135, c. viii., p. xxi.

² Quoted, p. 177, “Creasy on the Constitution.”

charters provided : " That without the sanction of Parliament no tax of any kind could be imposed, and no law could be made, repealed or altered : That no man should be arbitrarily fined or imprisoned, that no man's property or liberty be impaired, and that no man be in any way punished, except after a lawful trial : That there should be trial by jury : and that justice should not be sold or delayed." ¹ But early in the reign of Edward II. we find the Commons " complain that they are not governed as they ought to be, especially as to the articles of the Great Charter." ²

In the reign of Edward III. the division of Parliament into two Houses, as at present, is admitted by all writers to have taken place. The Commons no longer serve the barons but lead the van of progress. In the words of Guizot, " they resist every encroachment upon these rights which they are beginning to know and appreciate, they have acquired a consciousness of their own importance. Finally, either by their petitions, or by their debates in reference to taxation, they are daily obtaining a larger share in the government, exercise control over affairs which fifty years before they never

¹ " Progress of the Constitution," Creasy, p. 179.

² Hallam, p. 40.

heard mentioned, and become, in a word, an integral and almost indispensable part of the great national council, and of the entire political machine.”¹ This indicates a restless activity of intellect of which the orator would be the main factor, for his speech incorporates all the others.

In the year 1376 we find the Commons for the first time exercising the right of impeachment. Lords Latimer and Nevil, and four of the Commons—Lyons, Ellis, Peachey and Bury—“were accused before the House of Lords for various acts of ministerial misconduct.” Parliamentary responsibility was thus asserted and the first triumph of judicatory eloquence gained : for the Lords tried and convicted those impeached, except Bury, who absconded before the trial.

The long reign of Edward III., one of the most brilliant in our annals, was distinguished by the victories of Crécy and Poitiers ; and by the dawn of English literature, as seen in the works of Mandeville, Langland, Wycliffe and Chaucer ; it is likewise remarkable for the great political influence that the Commons acquired.

¹ “History of Representative Government,” Part II., lecture 22.

We find their right to participate in the legislation acknowledged by the very words employed in drawing out the statutes. At the head of each the following formula or one similar to it is used:—"A la requeste de la commune de son roialme par les petitions mises devant lui et son conseil par assent des prelates, comtes, barons, et autres grantz, au dit parlement assemblés."¹ We know how powerful the influence of the orator has been in modern times when the Parliament consulting together with one consent secured an extension of their privileges by unanimity of opinion: are we, then, not warranted to infer that the same influence was exerted in the fourteenth century?

Sir Matthew Hale tells us that in Edward the Third's time "the law was improved to its greatest height. The judges and pleaders were very learned and their pleadings polished; yet they have neither uncertainty, prolixity, nor obscurity. They were plain and skilful, and in the rules of law, especially in relation to real actions and titles of inheritance, very learned and excellently polished; so that at the latter end of this king's reign the law seemed to be near its meridian."²

¹ Guizot.

² Markham's History, p. 158.

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We may safely conclude that the learning and eloquence characteristic of the pleadings in the lower courts still more distinguished the debates in the highest court of the realm—the fountain of law. At least about this time it became so ; for, finding that the statutes enacted by the King, in compliance with their petitions, were often fraudulently drawn out by his officers, they guarded against this by preparing the Bills themselves, either House having the power to originate a Bill, which when approved of by the other was sent up for the sanction of the Crown.

Under the kings of the House of Lancaster the influence of Parliament increased, for they felt that their right to reign depended on the will of the people. In the ninth year of Henry IV. an important principle was recognised—one which may be considered as a fundamental condition for the growth of oratory—namely, the freedom of debate—"the right of the Houses that the King should take no cognisance of the subject of their deliberations until they had come to a decision upon it, and brought that decision regularly before him."¹

This was not granted by the Crown without much reluctance, indeed no parliamentary privi-

¹ Creasy, p. 249, quoting Hallam, "Middle Ages," p. 102.

lege was more unwillingly conceded, but the Commons struggled on till they got it, and have always anxiously guarded it.

In 1411 the King replied to the demand of the Speaker for the wanted liberty of speech that "he would have no novelties introduced and would enjoy the prerogative." Probably the right had been abused by rudeness and unbecoming language, for the times were rough and the manners unpolished. But there seems to have been no infringement of the privilege until 1450, when Thomas Young, a depute from Bristol, was imprisoned on account of a motion, concerning the succession to the throne, which he had brought forward in the House. In the Lancastrian reigns we find other important privileges secured, such as the freedom of members from arrest. But during the Wars of the Roses the country was too much distracted to allow the time and quiet requisite for the cultivation of eloquence.

When a great number of the nobility were slain, the progress of the popular party was somewhat retarded by the lack of leaders; but the revival of learning and the dissemination of books kept alive the public spirit, and any serious encroachment on the liberties of the people aroused stern resistance. It must be

admitted that the Tudor dynasty was more despotic than the later Plantagenet kings.

The Parliaments of the last two Henrys were servile and cowardly, afraid to resist the tyranny of the sovereign and overawed by the cruelties of the Star Chamber. But when, in 1525, Henry VIII. and Wolsey tried to raise a general tax of a sixth part of every man's substance, without the authority of Parliament, "all people cursed the Cardinal and his co-adherents as subversors of the laws and liberties of England."¹ And the same old chronicler, Hall, describes how at last "the demand of money ceased in all the realme, for well it was perceived that the commons would none paie."²

We find Henry himself informing the Pope, in a letter written in 1529, that "The discussions in the English Parliament are free and unrestricted; the Crown has no power to limit their debates or to control the votes of their members. They determine everything for themselves, as the interests of the Commonwealth require."³ Whatever the practice, the right principle of parliamentary government is here acknowledged.

¹ Creasy, p. 227.

• ² Hallam, pp. 686 and 700.

³ State Papers, vol. vii., p. 361, cited by Froude and Creasy.

The means taken to increase the royal influence, during these reigns, by the creation of new burghs and interference at elections, tacitly admitted the influence of oratory, by trying to lessen the freedom of debate.¹

During the Reformation period political discussions were kept in the background. Debates about the old and new forms of religion and Church government absorbed attention. The eloquence of the pulpit eclipsed that of Parliament. When we remember that Sir Thomas More was chancellor, and Cranmer Archbishop of Canterbury, and that there were many other talented men both in the Upper and Lower House, we can hardly doubt that many a stirring speech was made on the questions at issue, the influences of which would spread far and wide over the land.

The reign of Edward VI. was too short to allow the development of popular principles to any extent. Several good laws were passed, and the Reformed Religion had time to take root, but there was much distress and discontent in the country. When Mary ascended the throne the gloom deepened, and the fires kindled to burn the martyrs are the brightest lights of her reign.

¹ Hallam's "Constitutional History," vol. i., p. 60. Creasy, p. 279.

Elizabeth was welcomed with joy, and, although more imperious than most of the former sovereigns of England, yet she continued a favourite with the people. She preserved the dignity and power of the nation abroad and kept strict order at home, and these virtues covered many faults. The popular party in Parliament was active and strong, commerce flourished and the country was prosperous. Our greatest thinkers had leisure to pursue their investigations and develop their powers. But this reign was not distinguished for parliamentary eloquence. The times were not favourable for oratory. The Queen was much respected by her subjects, and the nation endured many things from her that no other sovereign would have dared to attempt. The speaker who was bold enough to oppose her wishes could count on her resentment—the sunshine of the Court would no longer cheer him, nor would the rewards and honours of the state be won by him. Like many of her sex, Elizabeth was easily offended, but not readily reconciled.

Francis Bacon sat as Member for Middlesex in the Parliament of 1593. That his oratory would be of a high order his works would lead us to expect ; that it was so we have the testi-

mony of men well qualified to judge. Ben Jonson writes thus :

"There happened, in my time, one noble speaker, who was full of gravity in his speaking. His language, where he could spare or pass by a jest, was nobly censorious. No man ever spoke more neatly, more pressly, more weightily, or suffered less emptiness, less idleness in what he uttered. No member of his speech but consisted of his own graces. His hearers could not cough or look aside from him without loss. He commanded when he spoke, and had his judges angry or pleased at his devotion."¹

But, as Macaulay says, "Bacon tried to" play a very difficult game in politics. He wished to be at once a favourite of Court and popular with the multitude. If any man could have succeeded in this attempt, a man of talents so rare, of judgments so prematurely ripe and of manners so plausible might have been expected to succeed. Nor indeed did he wholly fail. Once, however, he indulged in a burst of patriotism, which cost him a long and bitter remorse, and which he never ventured to repeat. The Court asked for large subsidies and speedy payment. The remains of Bacon's speech breathe all the spirit of the Long Parlia-

¹ Quoted by G. H. Lewes, "Philosophy," vol. ii., p. 18.

ment ! But his patriotism was short lived, he had not manliness to preserve it. If Pope's description of him, "The greatest, brightest, meanest of mankind," be justified by any part of his life, his conduct of the impeachment of his benefactor, the Earl of Essex, warrants it. In that trial he was eloquent, but it reflects no credit on him, for, when he might have been expected to use all his influence to rescue his friend, he employed all the arts of the orator to aggravate his faults and secure his destruction.

CHAPTER V

HAMPDEN AND THE PETITION OF RIGHT

THE literature of the sixteenth century had a powerful influence on the eloquence of the seventeenth. The works of Spenser, Shakespeare, Hooker and Bacon—works unsurpassed by the productions of any age—could not fail to elevate the national mind. In them orators have found their richest materials, and in them discovered high standards of excellence by which to measure their own efforts to express their sentiments effectively. These English classics were and are models of composition and mines of intellectual wealth. But the circulation of the English translation of the Bible did more to educate the people and disseminate popular principles than any of the books then or since published. Novalis says that “the Christian religion is the highest fact in the rights of man”; and if King James had been as wise as he was learned he would have seen that the “Authorised Version” would prove the curb of kingly prerogative. • The Biblical modes of thought and expression became national. The

eloquence of Parliament reflected the Puritan spirit, and owed much of its vigour, dignity, gravity, fervour and power to that ancient fountain—the well-spring of the world's prosperity—the Word of God. It has been found that the Bible contained better teaching of—

“ The solid rules of civil government
In its majestic unaffected style
Than all the oratory of Greece and Rome.
In it is plainest taught and easiest learnt
What makes a nation happy and keeps it so ! ”¹

The first half of the seventeenth century is one of the most memorable epochs in the history of parliamentary oratory, and demands special attention. James I. and Charles I. tried to rule with a high hand. They both believed in the divine right of kings to govern according to their sovereign will, and they attempted to extend the prerogative of the Crown beyond the power of law. In defence of the constitution Wentworth, Selden, Pym, Holles, Hampden, Coke, Eliot, Usher, Holland, Mallory, Philips, Digges, Fleetwood, Camden, Cotton, Hakwell, and others—“ the prime intellectual manhood of England ”—came forward “ determined on vindicating our ancient vital liberties by reinforcing our ancient laws made by our ancestors.”

¹ Milton, “ Paradise Regained.”

by setting forth such a character of them as no licentious spirit should dare to enter upon them.”¹

The bone of contention between the Crown and the Parliament was no trivial matter but concerned the fundamental principles of the constitution. Bolingbroke, referring to the first Stuart king, justly observes that “the doctrines which established the unbounded and ineffable prerogative of the King; which reduced the privileges of Parliament to be no longer an ancient and undoubted right and inheritance, but derived them from the permission and toleration of the Crown, and declared them liable to be retrenched at the will of the prince; and which by necessary consequence changed at once the nature of the English constitution, from that of a free to that of an arbitrary government; all these doctrines, we say, or the principles on which they are established, had been already publicly and frequently asserted by King James. They were the language of the Court; and a party had been formed in the nation who made profession of them. They were maintained in conversation. They were pleaded for in print; and they became soon afterwards the disgrace and profanation of the

¹ Speech of Wentworth.

pulpit."¹ It was by parliamentary oratory that they were counteracted and destroyed.

We are indebted for the Petition of Right to the influence of the orators of that age. In the house of Sir Robert Cotton, in Westminster, the leaders of the popular party met to form their plans: "Sitting by studious lamps, musing, searching, revolving new notions and ideas wherewith to present as with their homage and their fealty the approaching reformation."² The library of the great antiquary furnished these meetings with the precedents which formed the backbone of their memorable resolutions. This may be regarded as the first formation of parliamentary party which has been so powerful for good and ill in the government of the country and the history of which would embrace the most of that of the influence of oratory.

The reign of Charles I., one of the stormiest in our history, is so crowded with pregnant events, all of which were begotten by, or had an influence on, the parliamentary oratory of the period that it is difficult to know how to present them within the compass of the present work, for volumes have been filled with them.

¹ Bolingbroke, vol. i., pp. 1487-1488, quoted by Creasy, p. 280.

² John Forster, "British Statesmen," vol. iii., p. 7.

In all the important debates the orators and chief speakers took a part; each speech had its own weight, and the decisions of the House recorded their combined effect.

The Lords desired to amend it by the following clause:—"We humbly present this petition to your Majesty, not only with a care of preserving our own liberties, but with due regard to leave entire that sovereign power with which your Majesty is entrusted for the protection, safety and happiness of your people." The Commons refused to admit such a stipulation, seeing the dangerous results that would flow from it. The pith of the speeches delivered on this occasion affords a good illustration of the discussions of the period.

Mr Creasy in his valuable book on the Rise and Progress of the Constitution gives a few of the remarkable expressions of the vigilant guardians of our liberties and these we shall take the liberty to quote.

"The first speaker was Mr Alford who said 'Let us look into the Records and see what they are; what is Sovereign power? Bodin saith, that it is free from any conditions. By this we shall acknowledge a regal, as well as a legal power. Let us give that to the King the law gives him and no more.'¹

¹ John Forster, "British Statesmen," vol. iii., pp. 286-288.

“ Mr Pym,—‘ I am not able to speak to this question, for I know not what it is. All our Petition is for the laws of England, and this power seems to be another distinct power from the power of the law. I know how to add sovereign to the King’s person, but not to his power ; and we cannot “ leave ” to him a “ sovereign power ” for we never were possessed of it.’ ”

“ Mr Hackwell,—‘ We cannot admit of these words with safety ; they are applicable to all the parts of our Petition : it is in the nature of a saving, and by it we shall imply as we had encroached on his prerogative. All the laws we cite are without a saving : and yet, now, after the violation of them must we add a saving ? I have seen divers petitions where the subject claimed a right yet there I never saw a saving of this nature.’ ”

“ Sir Edward Coke,—‘ This is magnum in parvo. This is propounded to be a conclusion of our Petition. It is a matter of great weight, and, to speak plainly, it will overthrow all our Petitions ; it trenches to all parts of it ; it flies at loans, at the oath, at imprisonment, and at billeting of soldiers : this turns all about again. Look into all petitions of former times, they never petitioned wherein there was a saving

of the King's Sovereignty. I know that prerogative is part of the law, but sovereign power is no parliamentary word. In my opinion it weakens Magna Charta, and all the statutes; for they are absolute, without any saving of sovereign power, and should we now add to it, we shall weaken the foundations of law, and then the building must needs fall. Take we heed that we yield unto: Magna Charta is such a fellow, that he will have no sovereign. I wonder this sovereign was not in Magna Charta or in the confirmations of it. If we grant this by implication we give a sovereign power above all laws. Power, in law, is taken for a power with force, the sheriff shall take the power of the country; what it means here, God only knows. It is repugnant to our Petition; that is a Petition of Right, grounded on Acts of Parliament.'"

Mr Selden well referred to the attempt made by Edward I. to render illusory his confirmation of the Great Charter by inserting the words "*jure normæ nostræ*." Selden reminded his hearers of the resistance that was made to that dangerous interpolation, and how the King gave way and the obnoxious words were given up.

The House of Lords, on being informed of the objections made by the Commons to their addition, sought to fortify it by reasons which were reported to the Lower House by the Lord Keeper. He said (among other things) that they meant to give the King nothing now but what was his before, and as to the words "sovereign power," as he is a king, he is a sovereign, and must have power, and the words were easier than the word "prerogative."

Mr Mason then combated the reason of the Lord Keeper in a long and able speech in which he pointed out that if the Lords' addition to the Petition of Right was adopted, the judges would infallibly construe the Petition, as a solemn parliamentary acknowledgment of the King's having, beyond his ordinary prerogative (by which he could not impose taxes, or imprison) an extraordinary and transcendent sovereign power, for the protection of the people, for which purpose he might tax, imprison, or billet soldiers as he pleased. He warned the House that all such acts of sovereign power would be said to be for the protection of the people, and that the King alone would determine whether they were so or not. He pointed out the impossibility of such questions being dealt with by a Parliament "which is a body made up of

several wits, and may be dissolved by one commission," and if the matter were to be brought before the courts of law "why then the judges and the judgments may be easily conjectured."

Mr Glanville, in a subsequent conference with the Lords, urged these and other arguments against the addition with full force and skill, and Sir Henry Martyn justly appealed to the conduct and demeanour of the Commons as entitling them to the absolute conjunction of the Upper House.

"The moderate and temperate carriage of the House of Commons in this Parliament," said Sir Henry Martyn, "be it spoken without vanity, and yet in much modesty, may seem to deserve your Lordships' assistance to this petition *ex congrue et condigno*: especially if you would be pleased to consider the discontents, pressures and grievances, under which themselves in great number and the parts for which they serve, lamentably groaned, when they first arrived here, and which was daily represented unto them by frequent packets and advertisements out of their several counties, all which, notwithstanding, have not been able to prevail upon our moderation, or to cause our passion to overrule our discretions; and the same yet con-

tinueth in our hearts, in our hands, and in our tongues, as appeareth in the mould of this Petition wherein we pray no more but that we may be better treated hereafter. My Lords, we are not ignorant in what language our predecessors were wont to express themselves upon much lighter provocation; and in what style they framed their petitions; no less amends could serve their turn than severe commissions to inquire upon the violaters of their liberties: banishment of some, execution of other offenders, more liberties, new oaths of magistrates, judges and officers, with many other provisions written in blood. Yet from us there hath been heard no angry word in this Petition. No man's person is named. We say no more than what a worm trodden on would say (if he could speak), 'I pray tread on me no more.' "

The peers at length gave way and the Bill only waited the Royal Assent to become law, but that was not given in the usual form till the Commons, incensed by frequent evasions, were driven to sterner measures and began the impeachment of the favourites of the Crown. When Charles saw the strength of the whirlwind of passion his obstinacy had evoked, and the dire effects likely to accompany its progress, he

tried to calm the storm by yielding to its fury. He signed the Bill, and so the memorable Petition of Right became the law of the land. This great pillar of liberty may be fairly claimed as a triumph of parliamentary oratory.

One of the foremost men of the time, John Hampden, has not been mentioned as taking part in the discussion just described, but there is little doubt that he did. Clarendon says of him: "He was not a man of many words, and rarely began the discourse, or made the first entrance upon any business that was assumed, but a very weighty speaker, and after he had heard a full debate, and observed how the House was like to be inclined, took up the argument, and shortly and clearly and craftily so stated it, that he commonly conducted it to the conclusion he desired; and if he found he could not do that, he never was without the dexterity to divert the debate to another time, and to prevent the determining anything in the negative which might prove inconvenient in the future. Hampden made so great a show of civility and modesty and humility, and always distrusting his own judgment, and of esteeming his with whom he conferred for the present, that he seemed to have no opinions or resolutions but such as he contracted from the information

and instruction he received upon the discourses of others whom he had a wonderful art of governing and leading into his principles and inclinations, whilst they believed that he wholly depended upon their counsel and advice. No man had ever a greater power over himself, or was less the man that he seemed to be, which shortly after appeared to everybody, when he cared less to keep on the mask.”¹

That last sentence shows the leaning of the Royalist historian, but the whole description of Hampden as a speaker goes to prove that he was a wise orator. The only speech of his on record is said to have been delivered on the memorable morning after the Five Members had been impeached. Hampden was one of the five. We would have quoted the whole of it as an example of the style of the period, and a statement of the patriots’ principles; but it stands recorded that it “was judged by some learned gentlemen to be surreptitious.”² On that ground the editors of the old parliamentary history would not admit it. It may, however, be given as an illustration of the sermon style then fashionable.

“Mr Speaker,—It is a true saying of the wise

¹ “British Statesmen,” p. 330, quoted by Forster.

² “Parliamentary History,” vol. v., p. 169.

man, 'That all things happen alike to all men, as well to the good man as to the bad.' There is no state or condition whatsoever, either of prosperity or adversity, but all sorts of men are sharers in the same ; no man can be discerned truly by the outward appearance, whether to be a good subject, either to his God, his prince, or his country until he be tried by the touchstone of loyalty. Give me leave, I beseech you, to parallel the lives of either sort, that we may in some measure discern truth from falsehood ; and in speaking I shall similize their lives.¹

"I. In religion towards God. II. In loyalty and due subjection to their sovereign, in their affection towards the safety of their country.

"I. Concerning religion. The best means to discover between the true and false religion is by searching the sacred writings of the Old and New Testaments ; which is of itself pure, indited by the Spirit of God, and written by holy men, unspotted in their lives and conversations ; and by this sacred word may we prove whether our religion be of God or no ; and by looking in this glass we may discern whether we are in the right way or no.

"And looking into the same, I find by this truth of God, that there is but one God, one

¹ "British Statesmen," vol. iii., p. 339.

Christ, one faith, one religion, which is the gospel of Christ, and the doctrine of the prophets and apostles.

“In these two Testaments are contained all things necessary to salvation, if that our religion doth hang upon this doctrine, and no other secondary means, then it is true, to which comes nearest the protestant religion, which we profess as I really and verily believe . . .

“II. I come now, Mr Speaker, to the second thing intimated unto you, which was how to discern in a state, between good subjects and bad, by their loyalty and due subjection to their lawful sovereign ; in which I shall, under favour, observe two things.

“(1) Lawful subjection to a king in his own person, and the commands, edicts and proclamations of the prince and his privy council.

“(2) Lawful obedience to the laws, statutes and ordinances made, enacted by the king and the lords, with the free consent of his great council of state assembled in Parliament.”

We shall not follow him through the subdivisions of his discourse. After two Thirdlies, and three Secondlies, he concludes in the following words :—“And thus having troubled your patience in showing the difference between true protestants and false subjects and traitors, in a

state or kingdom, and the means how to discern them, I humbly desire my actions may be compared with either—both as I am a subject, protestant, and native of this present and happy Parliament, and as I shall be found guilty upon these articles exhibited against myself and the other gentlemen, either a bad or a good subject to my gracious sovereign and native country, to receive such sentence upon the same as by this honourable House shall be conceived to agree with law and justice.”

The method and gravity of this speech are characteristic of the Puritan mould of thought. These were not the times for light and prancing sentences; the sense of solemn responsibility seemed to rest on every brow, and there was rough work to do. Many were prepared to assert their rights at all hazards. When death and life were in the balance, joking would have been sadly out of place. This speech can hardly be taken as a sample of Hampden's eloquence, and yet it has some marks of that rare affability and temper in debate, that modesty and humility, which distinguished him. He had full command of his own passions and great control over other men. By his prudence and energy and bravery in the field as well as in the council, he won the respect of all his countrymen; his

friends loved him, his foes feared him, for he had "a head to contrive and a tongue to persuade and a hand to execute."¹

The memorable trial for ship money secured his fame, and when he was returned to Charles' third Parliament "the eyes of all men," Clarendon says, "were fixed on him as their *patriæ pater*, and the pilot that must steer the vessel through the tempests and rocks which threatened it. And I am persuaded his power, and interest, at that time, were greater to do good or hurt than any man's rank hath had in any time, for his reputation of honesty was universal, and his affections seemed so publicly guided, that no corrupt or private ends could bias them."

But Hampden as a statesman and orator was not so talented as his fellow-labourer, Pym, in the work of resistance to tyranny and assertion of the privileges of Parliament and the rights of the people.

¹ "British Statesmen," vol. iii., p. 378.

CHAPTER VI

JOHN PYM

JOHN PYM will ever stand among the foremost of the illustrious advocates of civil and religious liberty. The history of the parliamentary oratory of the period centres in him, for probably he was the most powerful speaker of the seventeenth century.¹

In the year 1614 he was returned as Member for the borough of Calne. In the Addle Parliament "such faces appeared there as made the Court drop." Pym seems to have distinguished himself even in his maiden speech, for it is said that he was twice imprisoned in the reign of James, and it is probable that he was among the forward Members who were, on the dissolution of this Parliament, after a sitting of two months, called before the Council and committed to the Tower. He was soon recognised as one of the leaders of the people, and in all the important debates and impeachments he took a prominent part.

¹ Forster, "British Statesmen," vol. iii., pp. 4-5.

" He surfeited on state affairs,
Died on a pleaurisie of caires
He knew the bounds and every thing
Betwixt the people and the King,
He could the just proportion draw
Betwixt prerogative and law.
He lived a patriot here so late,
He knew each syllable of state,
That had our charters all been gone,
In him we had them every one.
He durst be good and at that time,
When innocence was half a crime." ¹

Elegies are known to flatter and sometimes they do so grossly ; but the extract quoted embodies much historical truth, although coloured by a friendly hand.

The imprisonment which rewarded Pym for his opposition to the Court does not seem to have damped his courage. On more than one occasion he said: " I had rather suffer for speaking the truth, than that the truth should suffer for want of my speaking." ²

There was a religious element in most of the disputes of the time. Shortly after Charles' accession to the throne we find Pym bringing a clergyman, Dr Richard Montagu, before the bar of the House to answer for the publication of a book in which he made out that the prerogative

¹ Mercurius Britannicus, " British Statesmen," p. 298.

² Speech, 17th March 1641, " British Statesmen," p. 30.

of the King was paramount to English laws, being founded on divine right. Notwithstanding the intercession of Charles, the prisoner was only released on giving bail for his appearance.

This bold measure alarmed both Laud and Buckingham. The proceedings of the second Parliament were not calculated to allay their fears. Not long after it had assembled Pym was appointed one of the secret managers of an impeachment against the duke himself. He presented the eleventh and twelfth articles to the House of Lords. Eliot was the guiding intellect of this trial, and his fiery eloquence seemed all the more impassioned when contrasted with Pym's grave deliberative style of address.

After referring to his "want of oratory," and the proportion of matter of which he had to treat, Pym, in speaking of the grants and honours with which the duke had tampered, said: "There are some laws peculiar, according to the temper of several states; but there are other laws that are co-essential and co-natural with government, which being broken, all things run into confusion,—and such is that law of suppressing vice and encouraging virtue by apt punishments and rewards." Whosoever moves the King to give honour, which is a double reward,

binds himself to make good a double proportion of merit in that party that is to receive it, the first of value and excellency, the second of continuance. For as this honour lifts them above others so should they have virtue beyond others. And as it is also perpetual, not ending with their persons, but depending upon their posterity—so honour ought to have some such active merit to the commonwealth as may transmit a vigorous example to their successors to raise them to an imitation of the like.”¹

He went on to show that the bestowal of such honours on unworthy persons was prejudicial to the high court of Peers, to the King and to the kingdom, and after proving that the duke had done so, he concluded the “aggravation” of this article. After exposing the practice by which the duke had procured grants of money for his creatures he said :

“The quality of the fault I leave to your lordships. . . . This offence—*crimen peculatu*.—by that law was death and confiscation. Or whether your lordships will think it to carry proportion with that crime which is called, in the civil law, *crimen falsi* . . . which in the case of a bondman was death, and in the case of other men was banishment and confiscation

¹ “British Statesmen,” vol. iii., p. 34.

as the nature of the fact required. . . . Or, lastly, whether your lordships will estimate it according to the duke's own judgment in his own conscience. For direct actions are not afraid to appear open faced, but ill dealings desire to be marked with subtilty and closeness. And therefore it were even offence sufficient, were there no more than a cunning concealment of what he received from the king—since that argues either guilt or unthankfulness in receiving his master's bounty, guilt of unworthiness, as if he durst not avow the receipt of that which he had not merited, or guilt from fear of punishment by these inquisitions into his actions which are now come to pass."

Such bold language, so calm and so severe, testifies to the brave tribune spirit, which employed it in assailing the most powerful minister of the King. The immediate results of the movement against Buckingham were not encouraging to the orators. Parliament was abruptly dissolved and Pym was thrown into prison, and it was not till the third Parliament was called that he was released when returned as Member for Tavistock.

The plan adopted by Eliot, Pym and the other popular leaders was conciliatory but firm ; they were anxious to have the Petition of

Right passed as speedily as possible. "In business of weight," said Pym, "despatch is better than discourse."¹ His exertions to further the measure in its full strength were untiring. It was he who replied to the peremptory inquiry of Charles—"if they could not rest upon his royal word?"—thus: "We have his Majesty's coronation oath to maintain the laws of England—what need we then to take his word?"

We have already quoted from the speeches made on the proposed amendment by the Lords. While the King's first answer was occasioning great distrust and resentment in the House of Commons, Pym became the accuser before the Lords of one of the royal chaplains, Mainwaring, the slavish doctrines of whose sermons had made him an object of dislike to all the friends of liberty.

The following extract from this speech of Pym will illustrate his eloquence and wisdom:—"If I consider the matter, the offences are of a high nature, and of easy proof; if I consider your lordships, who are the judges,—your own interest, your own honour, the examples of your ancestors, the care of your posterity, all will be advocates with me in this cause, on the behalf of the commonwealth. And when I

¹ "British Statesmen," p. 43.

consider the King our Sovereign, the pretence of whose service and prerogative might, perchance, be sought unto as a defence and shelter for this delinquent. . . .¹

“ I cannot but remember that part of the King’s answer to the Petition of Right of both Houses, ‘ that his Majesty held himself bound in conscience to preserve their liberties,’ which this man would persuade him to impeach. Nor, my lords, can I but remember his Majesty’s love to piety and justice, manifested upon all occasions ; and I know love to be the root and spring of all other passions and affections. A man, therefore, hates, because he sees somewhat in that which he hates contrary to that which he loves ; a man therefore is angry, because he sees somewhat in that wherewith he is angry, that gives impediment and interruption to the accomplishment of that which he loves. If this be so, by the same act of apprehension, by which I believe his Majesty’s love to piety and justice, I must needs believe his hate and detestation of this man, who went about to withdraw him from the exercise of both. . . .²

“ Those commonwealths have been most durable and perpetual which have often reformed

• ¹ “ British Statesmen,” p. 47.

² *Ibid.*, p. 48

and recomposed themselves according to their first institution and ordinance, for by this means they repair the breaches and counterwork the ordinary and natural effects of time. . . .¹

“If these liberties were taken away there would remain no more industry, no more justice, no courage; for who will contend, who will endanger himself, for that which is not his own. The hearts of the people and their bounty in Parliament are the only constant treasure and revenue of the Crown, which cannot be exhausted, alienated, anticipated, or otherwise charged, and encumbered.”²

“But to slander and disgrace the laws and government is without possibility of any such excuse; it being a simple act of a malignant will, not induced nor excited by any outward provocation; for the laws carrying an equal right are revered equally by all.”³

In this manner, Pym proved and enforced the first article of the charge; but when he referred to the aggravating circumstances his lofty eloquence became bolder still, and we do not wonder that the culprit quailed before it. If the people had not been growing in influence, and the power of the Crown lessening, even

¹ “British Statesmen,” p. 50.

² *Ibid.*, p. 51.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 54

Pym could hardly have been so plain-spoken. The power of the orator rises with the power of the people. "The first 'aggravation' was from the place where these sermons were preached—the court—the king's own family, where such doctrine was before so well believed that no man need to be converted.¹ . . . The second was from the consideration of his holy function. He is a preacher of God's word ; and yet he had endeavoured to make that which was the only rule of justice and goodness, to be the warrant for violence and oppression. He is a messenger of peace, but he had endeavoured to sow strife and dissension, not only among private persons, but even betwixt the king and his people to the disturbance and danger of the whole state. If confessors were enjoined to frame the conscience of the people to the observances of these laws—certainly such doctrines as those of Mainwaring and such a preacher as this, would have been held most strange and abominable in all those great times of England."²

These few sentences from the memorable speech may serve to show the genius of the orator better than any description could do. The influence of Pym's eloquence had the immediate effect of condemning Mainwaring

¹ "British Statesmen," p. 55.

² *Ibid.*, p. 58.

“ to imprisonment during the pleasure of parliament ; to be fined a thousand pounds to the king : to make a submission both in writing and personally, at the bar of the house, and also at the bar of the Commons ; to be suspended from the ministry for three years ; and to be incapable of ever holding an ecclesiastical dignity or secular office, or of preaching at court.”

But in spite of this sentence the King shortly after promoted him to the bishopric of St David's ; and this was one of the foolish deeds that hastened the overthrow of the Stuart dynasty. During the prorogation of Parliament, Laud was also promoted to the see of London, and it was no wonder that the speakers, when the House met, expressed their indignation at such doings. Pym and Eliot did so in the course of the religious discussions which chiefly engaged the attention of that Parliament until its stormy dissolution. They both were hated by the Court as “ vipers of the Commonwealth.” Eliot was sent to prison, where he died ; Pym fortunately escaped. But the influence of their oratory was felt all over the country. They had sown thoughts in the minds of the Members of Parliament and they got time to take deep root and produce a hundred-

fold during the twelve years of tyranny which intervened between that Parliament and the calling of the next.

Charles was at length compelled by the force of circumstances to call the Commons together. His ministers had made unparalleled exertions to help him to rule by prerogative, but the efforts of Pym and Hampden had frustrated their attempts to raise money, and the sinews of war were needed to preserve the kingdom.

The Houses were opened by the King in person, 3rd April 1640. This was his haughty speech: "My lords and gentlemen, there never was a king that had a more great and weighty cause to call his people together than myself. I will not trouble you with particulars. I have informed my lord keeper and command him to speak and desire your attention."¹ That dignitary spoke as follows, "in the absurdest strain of high prerogative":—" . . . His majesty's kingly resolutions are seated in the ark of his sacred breast, and it were a presumption of too high a nature for any Uzza uncalled to touch it." Then he went on to say "that his majesty did not expect advice from them, much less that they should interpose in any office of mediation, which would not be grate-

¹ "British Statesmen," p. 85

ful to him; but that they should, as soon as might be, give his majesty a supply, and that he would give them time enough afterwards to represent any grievances to him.”¹

But that which was mentioned last, the Commons determined to consider first. Petitions were presented from several counties complaining of ship money, the Star Chamber and high commission courts and other heavy grievances. These produced a feeling of “divided duty,” and the acknowledged leader of the House took advantage of the hesitation. “Master Pym, a grave and religious gentleman” (says May, the historian of the Long Parliament), “in a long speech of nearly two hours, recited a catalogue of grievances which at that time lay heavy on the commonwealth, of which many abbreviated copies, as extracting the heads only, were with great greediness taken by gentlemen and others throughout the kingdom, for it was not then the fashion to print speeches of Parliament.”²

The influence of this speech was so great that almost all the historians of the period comment on its extraordinary effects throughout England. It is given in full in the “Lives of Eminent British Statesmen,” by Forster, but we shall

¹ “British Statesmen,” p. 85.

² *Ibid.*, p. 88.

But Hampden and Pym opposed the measure on the grounds that it would acknowledge the legality of the tax which they questioned, and also the sum demanded was so great. The discussions continued for two days, Hyde and the elder Vane taking the side of the court, and the former advocating the duty of granting a supply without naming the amount." But Charles would accept no less than he demanded, and again rashly dissolved Parliament.

The patriot orators defeated the arbitrary monarch. "It was observed," says Clarendon, "that in the countenances of those who had most opposed all that was desired by his majesty, there was a marvellous serenity, nor could they conceal the joy of their hearts for they knew enough of what was to come to conclude that the king would shortly be compelled to call another parliament."¹

The war with Scotland was disastrous. Charles knew the danger of summoning a Parliament, and to escape it he resorted to an old precedent of the times of Edward III., and called for a "council of peers" to meet him at York. But the popular leaders were not to be silenced by such a subterfuge. The expedient failed; for Pym prepared a petition for a

¹ "Old Parliamentary History," vol. viii., p. 124.

Parliament ; and Bedford, Essex, Hertford and Warwick placed their names at its head ; and Hampden and St John repaired with it to York. Other eight peers signed it before it was presented, and another petition signed by ten thousand citizens of London was forwarded by Pym to the committee. The result was that writs were issued for a new Parliament to meet on the 3rd of November. The interval was not lost by Pym and Hampden ; for it is stated by many historians that “ they rode through every county in England urging the electors to do their duty.” The power of the tongue was growing greater than that of the sceptre. Grant the orator only freedom of speech and liberty to travel and he will obtain an audience.

CHAPTER VII

THE LONG PARLIAMENT

WHATEVER the errors of the Long Parliament, it ought never to be forgotten that we owe to that assembly much of the liberty that is now enjoyed. It met on the 3rd of November 1640. The first week was occupied in the reception of petitions ; and there were some sharp debates on grievances, but in these the leaders did not take a prominent part. Lord Strafford arrived in London on the 10th of November and, on the 11th, Pym stated to the House that he had matter of the greatest moment to bring before the Members, and requested the Strangers' Gallery to be cleared and the outer door locked.

What followed Clarendon thus narrates :

“ Mr Pym, in a long formed discourse, lamented the miserable state and condition of the kingdom, aggravated all the particulars which had been done amiss in the government, and upon deliberation to change the whole frame and to deprive the nation of all the liberty and property which was their birthright by the laws of the land ; which were now no more

considered but subjected to the arbitrary power of the privy council, which governed the kingdom according to their will and pleasure.

“ We must inquire from what foundation these waters of bitterness flowed, what persons they were who had so far insinuated themselves into the [king’s] royal affections, as to be able to prevent his excellent judgment, to abuse his name and wickedly apply his authority to countenance and support their own corrupt designs. Though he doubted there would be many found of this class, who had contributed their joint endeavours to bring this misery upon the nation, yet he believed there was one more signal in that administration than the rest, being a man of great parts and contrivance, and of great industry to bring what he designed to pass ; a man, who in the memory of many present had sat in the house an earnest vindicator of the laws, and a most zealous assertor and champion for the liberties of the people ; but long since turned apostate from these good affections, and according to the custom and nature of apostates, was become the greatest enemy to the liberties of his country and the greatest promotor of tyranny that any age had produced ” (*i.e.* The Earl of Strafford).¹

¹ “ Old Parliamentary History,” vol. viii., p. 135.

“ After many hours of bitter inveighing and ripping up the course of the Earl of Strafford’s life before his coming to court, and his actions after, it was moved according to the secret resolution taken before, ‘ that he might be forthwith impeached of high treason,’ which was no sooner mentioned, than it found an universal approbation and consent from the whole house ; nor was there in all the debate one person who offered to stop the torrent by any favourable testimony concerning the earl’s carriage.”¹

Delay was dangerous, so there and then, at the head of upwards of three hundred representatives of the English people, Pym went to the House of Lords and impeached Thomas, Earl of Strafford, of high treason.

“ While his accuser was still at the bar, his lordship ” (says Baillie, principal of the University of Glasgow, in his graphic narratives) “ calls rudely at the door ; James Maxwell, keeper of the black rod, opens ; his lordship with a proud glooming countenance makes toward his place at the board-head. But at once many bid him void the House, so he is forced, in confusion, to go to the door till he was called.”

After “ consultation, being called in, he stands, but is commanded to kneel, and on his

— ¹ Clarendon, vol. i., p. 305.

knees to hear the sentence. Being on his knees he is delivered to the keeper of the black rod, to be prisoner till he was cleared of those crimes the House of Commons had charged him with.”¹

“He offered to speak, but was commanded to be gone without a word. In the outer room, James Maxwell required him as prisoner to deliver his sword. When he had got it, he cries with a loud voice for his man, to carry my lord lieutenant’s sword. This done he makes through a number of people, towards his coach, all gazing, no man capping to him before whom that morning the greatest of England would have stood discovered.”²

What a sudden downfall ! Why is the Prime Minister of the realm a prisoner ? How has the mighty fallen ? Can a few hours work such a change ? At noon in counsel with a monarch, before night, in prison ! Has the King withdrawn his confidence and promoted a rival ? No ; but the orator has spoken, and the powerful minister has been overthrown by the eloquence of a Commoner. Crimes have been unveiled, actions weighed, motives scrutinised, deeds condemned, justice aroused, passion, prejudice, patriotism inflamed and brought into play by

¹ “ British Letters,” vol. i., p. 217.

² “ British Statesmen,” p. 137.

the power of the orator to hurl down the proud offender.

It was a master stroke, and was followed by another, aimed at no less a dignitary than William Laud, Archbishop of Canterbury, who, on the motion of Pym, was accused of high treason. The accusation was carried up to the Lords by Denzil Holles. "Within less than six weeks," says Clarendon,¹ "for no more time was yet elapsed, these terrible Reformers had caused the two greatest counsellors of the kingdom, and whom they most feared and hated, to be removed from the king, and imprisoned, under an accusation of high treason, and frightened away the lord keeper of the great seal of England, and one of the principal secretaries of state, into foreign kingdoms, for fear of the like."

The judges who had prostituted the laws in support of the enforcement of ship money were not allowed to escape unpunished.² Bramstone, Davenport, Berkeley, Crawley, Trevor and Weston were obliged to give securities in enormous sums that they would abide the sentence of Parliament, while Sir Robert Berkeley, as the principal supporter of the tax,³ was

¹ Vol. i., p. 311.

² Whitelock's "Memorials," p. 39.

³ "British Statesmen," p. 140.

publicly arrested, when, from off the bench where he sat, he was carried away to prison, which struck a great terror in the heart of his brethren then sitting in Westminster Hall, and in all his profession." This bold step resulted from a speech in the House of Commons which on good grounds is ascribed to Pym. It has many of the characteristics of his eloquence, grave and precise, strong and stately, as the following extracts show:—

"Our ancestors drank the juice of their own vines, reaped the fruit of their own harvest; but now the poor man's plough goes to furrow the seas, to build ships! . . . Sir, these are the *maxima vitalia*—religion, justice, property—the heart, the head, the lives of this great body, and these being so distempered or obstructed, can the subordinate parts be free? . . . No foundation is firm that is not laid in Christ . . . It will be time enough to settle rules to live by when we are sure to live. . . . I am far from maligning the person, nor in my heart wish I the execution of any man; but certainly it shall be a justice well becoming this house to lay *their* heads at his majesty's mercy, who laid us under his feet; who had made us but tenants at will of our liberties and our estates! And though I cannot but approve of

mercy, as a great virtue in any prince, yet I heartily pray it prove a precedent as safe and useful to this oppressed state as that of justice ! . . .¹

“ In public government to pass by the innocent is equally unjustice as to punish the innocent. An omission of that duty now will be a guilt to us, render us shamed in history and cursed by posterity. . . . The power of future preservation is now in us. *Et qui non servat patriam cum potest, idem tradit destruenti patriam.* What though we cannot restore the damage of the commonwealth, we may yet repair the breaches in the bounds of monarchy, though it be without loss and charge, we shall so leave our children’s children fenced as with a wall of safety by the restoration of our laws to their ancient vigour and lustre ! . . . Hope of impunity lulls every bad great officer into security for his time. . . . What was at first, but corrupt law, is since, by encouragement taken from their impunity, become false doctrine. . . . Shall we therefore doubt of justice because we have need of great justice ? ”²

These are weighty sentences full of meaning, reflecting the lofty thoughts of a master mind—

¹ “ British Statesmen,” pp. 141-144.

² *Ibid.*, p. 144.

not swayed by the "ignorant present," but appealing to an enlightened and grateful future for his vindication of the eternal principles of right. The peroration of this speech is not surpassed for cogency of thought and beauty of expression, and it must have had a powerful effect. We know it had.

" 'Tis a happy assurance, sir, of his majesty's intention of grace to us, that our loyalty hath at last won him to tender safety of his people. And certainly (all our pressures well weighed this twelve years last past), it will be found that the passive loyalty of a suffering nation hath outdone the active loyalty of all times and stories.

" As the poet hath it,—

" *Fortiter ille facit, qui miser esse potest*; and I may as properly say, *Fideliter fecimus*. We have done loyally to suffer so patiently.

" Then since our royal lord hath in mercy visited us, let us not doubt but, in his justice, he will redeem his people—*Qui timide rogat, docet negari*! When religion is innovated, our liberties violated, our fundamental laws abrogated, our modern laws already obsoleted, the property of our estates alienated—nothing left us we can call our own, but our misery and our patience—if ever any nation might

justifiably, we certainly may now, now most properly, most reasonably, cry out, and cry aloud, '*Vel sacra regnet justitiæ, vel ruat coelum!*'"¹

No wonder that such eloquence could shake the throne and make every supporter of tyranny quail before it; no wonder that the democratic power wielded by such an orator and guided by such skilful and brave leaders should become dominant in the state.

The Bill for Triennial Parliaments did not receive the assent of Charles until every shift to elude it had been tried in vain, but when it became law the people by bonfires and other demonstrations of joy welcomed the event as a security of their freedom. The success of this measure also may be attributed to the influence of oratory.

But the great cause for which Pym had been for many years preparing himself was now at hand. No man was better acquainted than he was with Wentworth's abilities.

They had fought side by side, and each knew the prowess of the other. When Wentworth deserted the popular party, Pym was deeply grieved, and told him: "You are going to be undone. And remember also that though you

¹ "British Statesmen," p. 145.

leave us now I will never leave you while your head is upon your shoulders.”¹

The trial of the Earl of Strafford was opened on 22nd March. “This, my lords,” said Pym, “is a great cause and we might sink under the weight of it, and be astonished with the lustre of this noble assembly, if there were not in the cause strength and vigour to support itself and to encourage us. It is the cause of the king ; it concerns his majesty in the honour of his government, in the safety of his person, in the stability of his crown. It is the cause of the kingdom ; it concerns not only the peace and prosperity, but even the being of the kingdom. We have that piercing eloquence,—the cries and groans and tears and prayers of all the subjects assisting us.”²

On the 13th April, Lord Strafford made a great impression in his favour by the eloquence of the defence he then concluded, Whitelock in his Memorials gives it at length and adds : “Certainly never any man acted such a part, on such a theatre, with more wisdom, constancy and eloquence, with greater reason, judgment and temper, and with a better grace in all his words and gestures, than this great and excellent

¹ “British Statesmen,” p. 62.

² *Ibid.*, p. 158.

person.”¹ To reply to this defence Pym rose, and Baillie, who was present, said he made in half-an-hour, to the confession of all, “one of the most eloquent, wise, free speeches that ever we heard, or I think shall ever hear.”²

“My lords,” he began, “many days have been spent in maintenance of the impeachment of the Earl of Strafford by the House of Commons, whereby he stands charged with high treason, and your lordships have heard his defence with patience, and with as much favour as justice will allow. We have passed through our evidence, and the result is that it remains clearly proved that the Earl of Strafford hath endeavoured by his words, actions and counsels, to subvert the fundamental laws of England and Ireland, and to introduce an arbitrary and tyrannical government. . . .”

On the 9th of May the King signed the Bill of Attainder, and on the 12th, Strafford, “the greatest subject in power, and little inferior to any in fortune that was at that time in any of the three kingdoms,”³ suffered on the scaffold.

The Commons appointed Pym to justify the detention and impeachment of Laud. The

¹ Markham's History, p. 354.

² “British Statesmen,” p. 166.

³ Clarendon, p. 186.

speech was well timed, for other measures of importance were then pending, and it had an influence on their decision. The text and central thought of the oration will be seen in the following passage :—" Crimes acted by the spiritual faculties of the soul, the will, and the understanding, exercised about spiritual matters, concerning God's worship and the salvation of man, seconded with power, authority, learning and many other advantages, do make the party who commits very suitable to that description—spiritual wickedness in high places. . . . Here we have injustice without any means of restitution, even such injustice as doth rob the present times of their possessions, the future of their possibilities ! If they be examined, my lords, by legal means, in a civil way, as they stand in opposition to the publique good, and to the laws of the land, the accused will be found to be a traitor against his majesty's crown, an incendiary against the peace of the state, the highest, the boldest, the most impudent oppressor, that ever was—oppressor both of king and people."

Charles went to Scotland to plot against the Parliament ; Hampden and other patriots followed to watch his Majesty's movements. During the adjournment of the Commons, from

9th September to 20th October, Pym was Chairman of the Committee of the House, and his influence was acknowledged even by his enemies to be at this time greater than that of any man in the kingdom. He owed it principally to his eloquence. His power was that of the orator. He had provided against the only effectual means which the King had for checking it; for on the 8th May a Bill was passed which provided against the dissolution of Parliament without its own consent.

Mr Hallam says: "A rapid impulse rather than any concerted resolution, appears to have dictated a hardy encroachment on the prerogative.¹ . . . And the king's ready acquiescence in this bill, far more dangerous than any of these at which he had hitherto demurred, can only be ascribed to his own shame, and the queen's consternation at the discovery of the late plot."²

It was Pym who found out and frustrated the plot and guided the impulse. It was he also who, on 22nd November, presented the Grand Remonstrance to the House³; being a statement of Charles' misgovernment and the grievances of the people and an appeal to the nation.

¹ "Constitutional History," vol. ii., p. 158.

² "British Statesmen," p. 186.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 227.

For that purpose Hampden moved that it should be printed; Hyde (Lord Clarendon) opposed this, and the passions of both parties were inflamed unduly; for Sir Philip Warwick says: "We had caught at each other's locks, and sheathed our swords in each other's bowels, had not the sagacity and great calmness of Mr Hampden, *by a short speech*, prevented it, and led us to defer our angry debate until the next morning."¹

The Remonstrance was circulated, and had the desired effect in educating the people. When the King returned he very soon unveiled another intrigue which showed his intention to annul, as soon as he could, all the Acts of that Parliament, on the ground that for the past year it had not been free in its deliberations.

The Archbishop of York and other eleven bishops presented a protest to the Lords against the validity of the votes passed in their absence, on the ground that the popular discontents made it dangerous for them to attend Parliament. However, the Commons impeached them of high treason, and "on the 30th of December they appeared as culprits on their knees at the bar of the Upper House. Ten were committed to the tower, and two on the

¹ "British Statesmen," p. 229.

score of age and infirmity to the usher of the black rod. Thus closed 1641, the most eventful year of the English History."¹

As if fresh proof was needed of the King's desire to tyrannise, Charles afforded it when he tried to turn the same weapons against the patriots which when wielded by them had been so effective against his own ministers. On the 3rd of January, the Attorney-General, Herbert, in the House of Lords, said "the king had given him command to accuse and he did accuse the Lord Kimbledon, Mr Pym, Mr Hampden, Mr Holles, Sir Arthur Hazelrigge and Mr Strode of high treason." On the morning of the 4th, Pym addressed the Speaker in his own defence, and also on behalf of those accused with him, in a speech remarkable alike for its force, its clearness and beauty. In the afternoon of the same day Charles came with an armed force to seize the Five Members and said: "I am come to tell you that I must have them wheresoever I find them. Well, since I see all the birds are flown, I do expect from you that you will send them unto me as soon as they return hither."² The city protected the Members, and the Commons, after declaring the King's

¹ Forster, "British Statesmen," vol. iii., p. 232.

² *Ibid.*, p. 245.

proclamation "a false, scandalous and illegal paper," resented the breach of privilege by adjourning till the 11th of January and ordering the Members then to appear in their places. They were welcomed with a public triumph on that day, but the night previous Charles and his family retired to Hampton Court, and when he returned it was as a prisoner.

While the King wavered, the Commons were resolute and energetic, pushing on all their measures, for they saw that the crisis had arrived. They wanted money but could not get it to borrow except under certain conditions—the consent of the Lords was requisite to ratify the bargain and Pym conducted the conference with his accustomed ability and eloquence.

"I shall take occasion," he said, "from several branches of those petitions which your lordships have heard, to observe; First, The variety of dangers to which this kingdom is now subject. Secondly, The manifold distempers which are the causes of those dangers. Thirdly, The multiplicity of those evil influences which are the causes of those distempers."¹

The speech then delivered will remain a lasting monument of the genius of the orator. The language is simple, yet noble and dignified,

¹ "British Statesmen," p. 253.

calm and respectful, yet bold and earnest, amply illustrative, yet nervous and concise. He thus concluded: "And whether the kingdom be lost or saved (I hope, through God's blessing, it will be saved!), they shall be sorry that the story of this present parliament should tell posterity that, in so great a danger and extremity, the House of Commons should be enforced to save the kingdom alone, and that the peers should have no part in the honour of the preservation of it, having so great an interest in the good success of these endeavours in respect of their great estates and high degrees of nobility. My lords, consider what the present necessities and dangers of the commonwealth require, what the Commons have reason to expect, to what endeavour and counsels the concurrent desires of all the people do invite you, so that applying yourselves to the preservation of the king and kingdom, I may be bold to assure you in the name of all the Commons of England, that you shall be bravely seconded." ¹

The Speaker was ordered in the name of the House to thank Mr Pym for this speech, and its first effect was seen in the immediate passing of the Bill which deprived the bishops of their votes; the second in the complaints that the

¹ "British Statesmen," p. 260.

King made to the Speaker about some statements in it; and the conferences resulting from this, which widened the breach between the Parliament and the King. But the popular cause was strengthened by the many avowals of confidence which this speech evoked.

War was imminent, and both parties prepared for the conflict. The Parliament secured the two great magazines of the kingdom, the Tower and Hull. The events of the great Civil War it is not our duty to record, but the rapid sketch given of its causes—the disputes which occasioned it—warrants the assertion that the forces were mustered by the influence of oratory. We have yet to point to the supplies for the maintenance of the war as further proof of the power of eloquence.

When his friends took the field Pym was entrusted with the management of affairs. A "Committee of Safety," comprising five peers and ten commoners, had been entrusted with the executive power, but the bulk of the work fell on Pym. We find him in the council chamber guiding—by speaking; in the general's tent, encouraging and directing—by speaking; and in the Guildhall securing the confidence of the citizens, persuading them to give liberal aid and hearty support to the Parliamentary forces

even when the fortunes of the war were "unfavourable to the popular cause. On one of these civic occasions his speech seems to have had a wonderful effect. Peter Coles, who reported it, says: "At the end of every period the applause was so great that he was fain to rest till silence was again made.¹ . . . So that in the managing of this day's work, God was so pleased to manifest himself, that the well-affected went away not strengthened only, but rejoicing; and the malignants (as they have been called) some convinced, others silenced, many ashamed. Thousands were unexpectedly brought, as it were, into an unthought-of association, to live and die in the defence of those zealous and honourable assertors of their peace and liberties."²

Is it too much to say the powerful orator is, during the spell of his influence, sovereign in every democracy? The Royalists acknowledged the power of their enemy, for they called him "King Pym," when his reign was drawing to a close. He died on 8th December 1643, and was buried with royal honours in Westminster Abbey. As a patriot, a statesman and an orator, Pym was distinguished among the men of his time, and "there were giants in those days."

¹ "British Statesmen," p. 213.

² *Ibid.*, p. 284.

CHAPTER VIII

OLIVER CROMWELL

THERE was one notable person sitting in the Long Parliament less eloquent than Pym; one, though not an orator of the first rank, who rose to be the foremost man in the Commonwealth.

Oliver Cromwell stands in history among the successful warriors. But he was one of the most influential speakers of his day. If he had not been called to command the Ironsides he might have become leader of the Commons, for—"his eloquence was full of fervour, as Sir Philip Warwick remarks, although his linen was plain and not very clean" and "his voice harsh and untuneable."¹ Such a spirit as Cromwell's would not long remain silent. His convictions of truth and right were strong, as seen in his speech on Religion and Liberty, which was fervent and polished, as the times required. With eloquence and force, Cromwell stated the principles of liberty in religion in his speech, 17th September 1656. When his second Parliament met he said :

¹ Markham, p. 361. Also "British Statesmen," vol. vii., p. 66.

“ Truly, our business is to speak things both for the glory of God and with reference to His interest in the world. His most peculiar interest, His Church, the Commission of the Faithful followers of Christ. . . .¹

“ Men who believe in Jesus Christ have the Form that gives being to true religion. . . .

“ Whosoever hath this Faith, let his form be what it will ; he walking peaceably, without prejudice to others under other Forms—it is a debt due to God and Christ ; and He will require it, if that Christian may not enjoy his liberty.²

“ If a man of one form will be trampling upon the heels of another form ; if an Independent, for example, will despise him who is under Baptism and will revile him, and reproach and provoke him—I will not suffer it in him. If on the other side, those of the Anabaptist judgment shall be censuring the Godly Ministers of the Nation who profess under that of Independence ; or if those that profess under Presbytery shall be reproaching or speaking evil of them, traducing and censuring of them,—as I would not be willing to see the day when England shall be in the power of the Presbytery

¹ “ Famous Speeches,” p. 3, edited by Herbert Paul.

² *Ibid.*, p. 21.

to impose upon the consciences of others that profess faith—so I will not endure any reproach to them. . . . But God give us hearts and spirits to keep things equal. Which, truly, I must profess to you, hath been my temper! . . .¹

“And if it shall be found to be the Civil Magistrate’s real endeavour to keep all professing Christians in this relation to one another—not suffering any to say or do what will justly provoke the others—I think that he that would have more liberty than this is not worthy of any. . . .”²

“Make it a shame to see men bold in sin and profaneness and God will bless you. You will be a blessing to the Nation. The mind is the man. If that be kept pure, a man signifies somewhat; if not I would very fain see what difference there is betwixt him and a beast.”

On 20th April 1653 Cromwell ordered his soldiers to clear the House, first saying to the Members: “You are no longer a Parliament; the Lord has done with you; he has chosen other instruments for carrying on his work.” Thus was eloquence locked out. The rule of many gave birth to the rule of one, when the

¹ “Famous Speeches,” p. 21.

² *Ibid.*, p. 22

³ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

power of the sword triumphed for a time. But seven years afterwards 1660 brought the Restoration, and opened again the doors of Parliament.

The effect of the oratory of the former thirty years was not effaced. In the words of Quizot: "The cause of monarchy was gained, but that of absolute monarchy was lost for ever. . . .

"The House of Commons was in effect the preponderant branch of the parliament. Its direct or formal sovereignty was a revolutionary which was now generally decried and execrated; and the Crown and the House of Lords had recovered their rights and their dignity. But their overthrow had been so violent and complete, that, even after the fall of their enemies, they were unable to re-establish themselves in their ancient ascendancy; and neither the faults nor the reverses of the House of Commons could obliterate the effect of its terrible victories."¹

When the Court of the Star Chamber and military tenures were abolished, may we not regard these reforms as examples of the influence of oratory?

¹ "On the English Revolution," quoted by Creasy, p. 300.

CHAPTER IX

THE REVOLUTION

THE second Parliament of Charles II. passed the Habeas Corpus Act. This statute is of great value, although it established no new principle.¹ The influence of the reaction was too strong to be favourable to parliamentary eloquence, either in this reign or in that of James II. Of it Hume admits "the whole of this short reign consists of attempts, always imprudent, often illegal, sometimes both, against whatever was most loved and revered by the nation."² The gourd of arbitrary power found the soil prepared by the deeds of the former king, but its rapid growth secured its speedy destruction.

Halifax, one of the chief ministers of Charles II., was a speaker of no ordinary ability. By the influence of his eloquence the Exclusion Bill, which had passed the Lower House with a large majority, was rejected by the Lords. There was a great assemblage of Peers, and the King himself was present during the debate,

¹ Macaulay, vol. i., p. 248.

² Quoted by Creasy, p. 306.

which was long and earnest. Shaftesbury and Essex and Sunderland were in favour of the Bill, "but a noble lord appeared against it, who that day, in all the force of speech, in reason, in arguments of what could concern the public or private interests of men, in honour, in conscience, in estate, did outdo himself and every other man; and in fine his conduct and his parts were both victorious, and by him all the wit and malice of that party was overthrown."¹

This is the testimony of the Earl of Peterborough, who was probably one of the illustrious audience. Referring to the same debate Macaulay says: "The genius of Halifax bore down all opposition. Deserted by his most important colleagues, and opposed to a crowd of able antagonists, he defended the cause of the Duke of York, in a succession of speeches which, many years later, were remembered as masterpieces of reasoning, of wit and eloquence. It is seldom that oratory changes votes. Yet the attestation of contemporaries leaves no doubt that, on this occasion, votes were changed by the oratory of Halifax."²

The first speech in the Commons of the Parliament of James was made by Edward

¹ Quoted by Macaulay, vol. i., p. 259.

² *Ibid.*

Seymour, Member for the city of Exeter. He had been Speaker in some of the former Parliaments and was well acquainted with the business of the House. Being a man of wealth and illustrious descent his influence would have been great in any sphere, but in such a House, of which the majority of the Members were inexperienced, his eloquence made him a formidable opponent to any party.

“Before we proceed to legislate on questions so momentous,” he said, “let us at least ascertain whether we really are a legislature. Let our first proceeding be to inquire into the manner in which the elections have been conducted. And let us look to it that the inquiry be impartial. For if the nation shall find that no redress is to be obtained by peaceful methods, we may perhaps ere long suffer the justice which we refuse to do.”¹

No one present was bold enough to second the motion of the haughty Cavalier. But the French ambassador told his master that many approved who did not dare to applaud. This remarkable speech set currents of discontent in motion; and these, fed by James’ continued misgovernment, combined their force to sweep the Stuart dynasty from the throne.

¹ Macaulay’s History, vol. i., p. 516.

The intolerant bigotry of the King had estranged all sections of his people from him and united the Protestants in adopting measures to overthrow his power. William of Orange was invited to come to help. On the 5th of November 1688 he landed at Torbay; James fled. William on entering London was advised and requested to assume the provisional government of the country and to summon a convention of the states of the realm. He did so.

Among the distinguished speakers who then assembled, the following may be mentioned¹:—Powle, Thomas Littleton, William Sacheverell and Sir Robert Clayton. The eloquence of the first was remarkable for its gravity, adapted well to persuade at a serious conjuncture of affairs; and that of Littleton, for its logical acuteness and vehemence. But Charles Montague and John Somers, who for the first time took their seats in Parliament, soon eclipsed by the brightness of their genius the fame of all these veterans.²

On the 28th of January 1689 the House of Commons, after a long debate, passed their famous vote "that King James had abdicated and that the throne was thereby vacant."

Danby and Halifax persuaded the Lords to

¹ Macaulay, vol. ii., p. 622.

² *Ibid.*, p. 624.

come to a similar resolution, and to declare the Prince and Princess of Orange, King and Queen of England. But the conditions on which the crown ought to be given occasioned much discussion in the Commons. These were latterly embodied in the Declaration of Right, drawn out by a committee of which Somers was chairman. That such an honourable position should be occupied by a young barrister, with no family connections, who had only been ten days or so in the House, is a proof both of his eminent abilities and the influence of his oratory.

It would be easy to show the momentous importance of every decision then come to, and the influence which the orators had in guiding the proceedings ; but let the following estimate of the final resolve of that Parliament suffice :—
“The Declaration of Right,” says Lord Macaulay, with even more than his wonted eloquence, “though it made nothing law which had not been law before, contained the germ of the law which gave religious freedom to the Dissenter, of the law which secured the independence of the judges, of the law which limited the duration of Parliament, of the law which placed the liberties of the Press under the protection of the juries, of the law which prohibited the slave trade, of the law which abolished the

sacramental test, of the law which relieved Roman Catholics from civil disabilities, of the law which reformed the representative system, of every good law which has passed during a hundred and sixty years, of every good law which may hereafter in the course of ages be found necessary to promote the public weal, and to satisfy the demands of public opinion. The highest eulogy which can be pronounced on the revolution of 1688 is this, that it was our last revolution.”¹

William did not find the crown of England easy to wear. The banished family were continually plotting to recover the throne. He knew that even his most trusted ministers were playing a double game: eating his bread and yet trying to undermine his power. The contentions of the two great parties, Whigs and Tories, were never more bitter, daily disturbing the peace of the country and obstructing its government. The morality of public men was very low. Vice of every description was rampant; perjury and perfidy flourished.

The orators who guided the revolution continued to guide the councils of the realm. Somers and Montague soon rose to the foremost positions, almost solely through the

¹ Macaulay, vol. ii., p. 668.

influence of their eloquence and commanding talents.

During the four years that Somers sat in the House of Commons, he had always been gladly heard, and in important conferences with the Lords, as in the case of Oates, and the Succession Bill, the management was entrusted to him. His promotion to be Lord Keeper gave universal satisfaction, for no one was better qualified to fill the post. The Whigs continued to regard him as their leader. "He was equally eminent as a jurist and as a politician, as an orator and as a writer. His speeches have perished; but his state papers remain and are models of terse, luminous and dignified eloquence."¹ The superiority of his powers was admitted by all, his enemies slandered him under the name of Cicero. When Somers left the House, Montague had no formidable rival in it.²

The young adventurer found politics more congenial to his tastes and more profitable than the clerical profession to which he had been destined. Montague would have willingly, at thirty, accepted of a comfortable parsonage; but in Parliament his prospects brightened; and in a few years he was "a peer with twelve thousand a year."

¹ Macaulay, vol. iv., p. 447.

² *Ibid.*, p. 450.

“ At thirty-seven, he was first Lord of the Treasury, Chancellor of the Exchequer and a Regent of the kingdom ; and the elevation he owed not at all to favour, but solely to the unquestionable superiority of his talents for administration and debate.” ¹

“ The extraordinary ability with which, at the beginning of the year 1692, Montague managed the conference on the Bill for regulating Trials in cases of Treason placed him at once in the front rank of parliamentary orators. On that occasion he was opposed to a crowd of veteran senators renowned for their eloquence,—Halifax, Rochester, Nottingham, Mulgrave,—and proved himself a match for them all. He was speedily seated at the board of Treasury ; and there the clear-headed Godolphin soon found that his young colleague was his master. . . . To this day we may discern in many parts of our commercial and financial system, the marks of the vigorous intellect and daring spirit of Montague.”

An account of the discussion on the Treason Bill has been preserved—written by the chief speaker himself. “ We have framed,” says Montague, “ a law which has in it nothing exclusive, a law which will be a blessing to

¹ Macaulay, vol. iv., p. 454.

every class, from the highest to the lowest. The new securities, which we propose to give to innocence oppressed by power, are common between the premier peer and the humblest day labourer. The clause which establishes a time of limitation for prosecutions protects us all alike. To every Englishman accused of the highest crime against the state, whatever be his rank, we give the privilege of seeing his indictment, the privilege of being defended by counsel, the privilege of having his witnesses summoned by a writ of subpoena and sworn on the Holy Gospels. Such is the bill which we sent up to your Lordships; and you return it to us with a clause of which the effect is to give certain advantages to your noble order at the expense of the ancient prerogatives of the Crown."

After referring to the close family connections of the peers and to the many sentences passed on commoners on insufficient evidences, he continued: "We cannot, therefore, under the mild government which we now possess, feel much apprehension for the safety of any innocent peer. Would that we felt as little apprehension for the safety of that government! But it is notorious that the settlement with which our liberties are unseparably bound up

is attacked at once by foreign and by domestic enemies.

“ We cannot consent at such a crisis to relax the restraints which have, it may well be feared, already proved too feeble to prevent some men of high rank from plotting the ruin of their country. To sum up the whole, what is asked of us is that we will consent to transfer a certain power from their Majesties to your Lordships. Our answer is that, at this time, in our opinion their Majesties have not too much power and your Lordships have quite power enough.”¹

If the only effect of this speech had been to raise the orator to the exalted position he subsequently gained, it would have been worthy of record as a proof of the influence of eloquence ; but it served more important ends, and the extracts now given may be considered fragments of the mirror of these times. Each class was jealous of its own privileges ; the Commons were gradually growing in power, and at this important crisis in European politics it might be said that the fate of the civilised world depended on the votes of the representatives of the English people.

As the decisions were often dependent on the

¹ Macaulay, vol. iv., p. 157.

He kept the peace of this country at home and abroad, and that too when foreign war and domestic levy were often popular. The blessings of peace far outweigh the glories of war. No great law dates its commencement from the time of Walpole, but much honour is due to him for preserving the constitution and the revolution settlement.

The constitutional question of 1911 was anticipated in the speech of Walpole, 8th December 1819, on the Peerage Bill. He said: "Among the Romans, the temple of fame was placed behind the temple of virtue to denote that there was no coming to the temple of fame but through the temple of virtue. But if this bill is passed into law, one of the most powerful incentives to virtue would be taken away."

(The Bill was to prohibit the King from increasing the number of peers by more than six.)

"When great alterations in the constitution are to be made, the experiment should be tried for a short time before the proposed change is finally carried into execution lest it should produce evil instead of good; but in this case when the bill is once sanctioned by Parliament there can be no future hope of redress, because the Upper House will always oppose the repeal of an act which has so considerably increased

their power. Whatever the Lords can gain must be acquired at the loss of the Commons and the diminution of the Royal Prorogation.”¹

“ But the strongest argument against the bill is that it will not only be a discouragement to virtue and merit, but endanger our excellent constitution. . . . The crown is dependent upon the Commons by the power of granting money, the Commons are dependent on the crown by the power of dissolution. The lords will now be made independent by both.

“ If when the Parliament was made septennial, the power of dissolving it before the end of seven years had been wrested from the Crown, would not such an alteration have added immense authority to the Commons? and yet, the prerogative of the Crown in dissolving Parliaments may be and has been abused oftener than the power of creating peers. . . .

“ How can the Lords expect the Commons to give their concurrence to a bill by which they and their posterity are to be for ever excluded from the peerage? How would they themselves receive a bill which should prevent a baron from being made a viscount, a viscount an earl, an earl a marquis, and a marquis a duke? Would they consent to limit the number of any

¹ “ Famous Speeches,” Herbert Paul, p. 34.

line of policy adopted by the principal speakers (for at the beginning of William's reign there was no ministry¹), a strong case might easily be made out for the influence of oratory. Many men who were not orators, and some but second-rate speakers, exercised, from party connections and other causes, a great controlling influence over the debates: Harley, Foley and Howe in the Tory interest; and Russell and Wharton for the Whigs.

The venality and speculation ascribed to public men had roused the indignation of the country, and that soon found vent. It was reported that the East India Company had employed large sums of money for corrupting public men, and the names of the three principal Tories were mentioned as recipients of bribes—Trevor, Seymour and Leeds. Wharton, who was a great scoundrel, but a good speaker and a conscientious Whig, had the charges sifted, and, finding good grounds for them, a parliamentary inquiry was instituted, which brought disgrace on the offenders and so weakened the Tory party. In advocating the impeachment of Leeds, Wharton said:

“Can we think it strange that our difficulties should have been great, when we consider the

¹ Macaulay, vol. iv., p. 437.

“That he despised not only all difficulties and all refinements but all the resources of the oratorical art beyond its great ‘origin and fountain,’—strong sense, clear ideas, anxious devotion to the object in view—carrying the audience along with the speaker—may well be supposed from the manly and plain, the homely and somewhat coarse, character of his understanding.”¹ But he sometimes left the beaten track and relied on eloquence of a high order. On the motion for his removal, made by Sandys in 1741, he made an able defence of his policy.² Of that speech only his own minutes remain.

The following indicate his powers:—“Whatever is the conduct of England, I am equally arraigned. If we maintain ourselves in peace and seek no share in foreign transactions, we are reproached with tameness and pusillanimity. If we interfere in disputes, we are called Don Quixotes and dupes to all the world. If we contract guarantees, it is asked why the nation is wantonly burdened. If guarantees are declined, we are reproached with having no allies.”³ This was for the exordium to one of his finest speeches, which was delivered with great grace and dignity.

Brougham, vol. vi., p. 212.

Quoted by Brougham, vol. vi., p. 215.

